

**GIVING BACKCHAT:  
GENDERED SOCIAL CRITIQUES IN ANGLO-CARIBBEAN,  
MIGRANT FEMALE LITERATURE**

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in English

by

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## ABSTRACT

Giving backchat is a popular term in the Anglophone Caribbean and is locally considered a form of gendered speech. This form of discourse is like the African American concept of talking back with the exception of intent; giving backchat is not intended to convey disrespect whereas backtalk is impertinent. Typically applied to girls and young women, giving backchat is a way of challenging, interrogating, and upsetting social, cultural, and familial gender-biased norms in closed and sometimes unyielding groups that seek to impose forced silences on female group members. This project examines the appearances giving backchat makes throughout the texts of Anglophone Caribbean female writers—particularly those who are migrant, immigrant, and resident in Britain beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and extending to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Female authors with Caribbean roots residing in the UK such as Mary Prince, Mary Seacole, Jean Rhys, Una Marson, Beryl Gilroy, Joyce Gladwell, Andrea Levy, Jean Binta Breeze, and Eintou Pearl Springer utilise giving backchat in their texts, which include slave narratives, travelogues, novels, and poetry, to question the often stagnant roles women occupy in societies; to challenge false immigrant narratives or immigrant narratives exclusive of girls and women of colour; and to create dialogues more inclusive of the colonised or formerly colonised, female Other living in the Imperial, host society. This project examines several examples of immigrant narratives by these authors, fiction and nonfiction, to determine how giving backchat functions in these texts to promote a discourse focused on issues relevant to Anglophone Caribbean immigrant women living in the UK.

**Key words:** *Caribbean literature, giving backchat, gender, migration*

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For  
Ya Almeera X

**We Have Always Been There...**

**by**

**Eulalia Bernard**

We have always been there...

We have always been there.  
We are the miracle of survival.  
We have taken care of lands of people.  
We have dug up foolishness.  
We have warred disguised poverty.  
We are indomitable.

Yes, you are beauty crossed with energy.  
Yes, you are queens, warriors, higglers,  
teachers, prostitutes and preachers.  
Yes, you are daughters of Isis.  
Yes, you captured the sprouts of evil  
cooked, and crushed them to ashes.  
Yes, you are the architect of good gold.

I have the *infula* to infuse justice.  
I am the archivolt of my spear,  
I erect it and demand its inoculation  
to be powerful.

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## Introduction

Gender theorist Dianne Hall's research on medieval Ireland notes that words can easily be cast as weapons; women who speak out act as instigators in public acts of male violence (123). Hall recounts a 1312 court case in which Adam, son of John de Midia murdered William Drak; was fined; and received some prison time (122). A closer review of the case reveals that Adam's wife initiated the altercation by calling William's brother an apostate in a public tavern, leading to a brawl and William's stabbing (123). Hall notes that in this instance, "words delivered by a woman had the power to plunge a group of men into violence and led to the death of one of them" (123). This call to violent action by a woman's words seems unlikely given the relatively secondary societal roles women have occupied in favour of men, yet women have demonstrated historically that their words can elicit a response. For example, in early 2017, the woman who accused 14-year-old Emmett Till of grabbing, menacing, and being sexually crude to her in 1955 admitted that she fabricated the entire incident (Pérez-Peña par. 4). Although her statement represents hearsay and was the result of a script—the innocent, White, female victim of Black male hyper-sexuality—it led to Till's brutal murder by two adult White males. It cannot escape notice that these incidents, 600 years apart, demonstrate the power women's words can yield. What is the nature of this power and is it related to the strategies families and societies use to silence women? Perhaps the possibility behind words spoken by females—the ability to either incite violence without prompting as with Adam's wife or to use one's voice to enact a violent script as with Till's female accuser—that motivates families and societies to use cultural codes to silence them. In response, girls, adolescent females, and women learned to give backchat—to challenge, interrogate, and subvert gender-based, imposed silences. This text examines giving backchat in written form although this act is typically verbal. It will undertake a survey of

nonfiction and fiction texts by Caribbean female immigrant, migrant, and resident writers in Britain, focusing on the 20<sup>th</sup> century but also touching on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, to examine a tendency to challenge imposed silences, intended to police and censor their speech.

For Black Caribbean immigrants moving to the UK from the 20<sup>th</sup> century and later, the expectations about life in Britain were similar while their experiences were slightly different. Caribbean immigrants left societies in which they represented a population majority that held only a minor share of that society's power and immigrated to Britain where they became a population minority in an unwelcoming environment and were, for the most part, powerless. The consensus was that they were going 'home' to Mother England, and that because they were British, they would be welcomed. However, the issues they faced resulting from their 'immigrant' status and perceived difference were like the experiences of Caribbean immigrants of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sociologist Paul Gilroy notes that West Indians immigrating up to the onset of regional independence should have been included in the idea of British national identity but were often "seen as bastard people occupying an intermediate space" between Britishness, "which is their colonial legacy and an amorphous, ahistorical relationship with the dark continent" (*Ain't No Black* 45). The exclusion of Anglophone Caribbeans from British national identity resulted from the linking of "conceptions of national belonging and [racial] homogeneity" (*Ain't No Black* 45). Immigrant women faced an additional issue with settling into the new environment as they were typically viewed with suspicion by governments, which hesitated to allow single women to immigrate because the women might be prostitutes; by resident women, who saw immigrant women as sexual threats; and by societies, which marginalised immigrant women because they represented an unnameable difference. This suspicion was marked if the women came from tropical or unknown areas such as the Caribbean.

This image of women from tropical climates as more sexual extends back in the White, European imagination to the display of Sarah Baartman, the so-called Hottentot Venus, throughout the continent. During chattel slavery in the Americas, Brown and Black girls and women were subjected to sexual abuse and assault because they were perceived as lascivious by their White, European, male attackers. While Caribbean women did not arrive in an environment like chattel slave societies, they did arrive in a nation in turmoil that could not cope with the additional issue of race. Britain in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was in flux; it was either plunged into an international war or engaged in the slow process of recovering from the effects of a war.

With this pattern of battle and recovery, it had to cope with large numbers of newcomers, especially after 1945, refugees from Europe and cheap labour from the Empire, including immigrants from Caribbean colonies who settled throughout Britain but especially in England. There are several texts about immigration to Britain and some address how these newcomers adapted to their lives as immigrants. While those texts address the broader sociological implications of immigration, few focus on the predicament of Caribbean female immigrants. In addition, there are studies on Commonwealth immigrants in Britain beginning at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and on the literature of Caribbean immigrant writers, but a review of this literature reveals that the focus is very narrow. Much of the research emphasises male writers in the 1950s or the work of the first generation of female writers born to Commonwealth immigrant parents publishing in the 1990s and beyond. This leaves a gap in literary studies—particularly in research on Caribbean female writers, migrant, immigrant, and resident in the UK. A close examination of these writer's texts reveals their determination and unwillingness to be marginalised, which takes the form of writing texts that offer an accurate representation of

Caribbean female immigrant life in Britain and, in those texts, talking back—giving backchat to the social, familial, and cultural expectations placed on them.

Caribbean women have a long history with giving backchat. Challenging, testing, questioning, and rebelling is a centuries-old method used throughout the region by girls, adolescent females, and women to assert their right to personhood—the right to be—and over the centuries of European, African, and Indian engagement in the region, Caribbean women have earned a substantial regional reputation for never retreating from a verbal challenge. Yet, situations occur in which Caribbean women seem to lose that verbal upper hand, for example, during the region’s period of chattel slavery, in the post-emancipation period, and finally during the period of Caribbean migration to the UK. Perhaps during those times Caribbean women seemed silent—to acquiesce to the multiple subaltern roles they were forced to assume. However, it is at these times of intense emotional, familial, social, and economic turmoil that regional women truly demonstrated their unwillingness to give up or give in to external pressures aimed at maintaining gender-based, often oppressive, roles.

Beginning in the chattel slavery period and continuing to the contemporary period, Caribbean women employ literature as a tool for giving backchat. In diasporic Caribbean female texts, the goals are to tell the stories of girls, adolescent females, and women while challenging and questioning elements of family, society, and culture that marginalise regional females. This research will examine how Caribbean female writers give backchat in their texts. Specifically, this research focuses on the writings of Anglophone Caribbean females who at some point geographically and socially have contact with the British Empire and all that it represents, meaning Caribbean female diasporic writers who are immigrants, migrants, or their descendants living in the UK. This text is divided into four- chapters. Three chapters are genre-based:

autobiography, the novel, and poetry. The first chapter focuses on defining giving backchat by situating the term in a historical, cultural, and linguistic context and explaining the term's gendered connotation. The autobiography chapter examines the texts of three writers, locating the ways giving backchat occurs in personal narratives and in the life of a Caribbean female chattel slave, travel writer, and Christian migrant struggling with faith. The novel chapter analyses how giving backchat can be used in fictional texts to question the concepts of identity and belonging, such as British versus Briton, in the first and second generation. Anglophone Caribbean texts by migrant writers demonstrate the various ways that female immigrants can be marginalised but also their methods of rejecting those forms of marginalisation. A reading of the texts of Caribbean female writers in the diaspora offers a multitude of examples of the treatment they received but also their refusal to become members of a nameless, faceless group of immigrants silently living in the Britain.

**CHAPTER I:**

**GIVING BACKCHAT**

## A Definition Long Overdue

Don't you know you can't get de best of no woman in de talkin' game? Her tongue is all de weapon a woman got.

Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* 30

Information available on the term backchat is limited. Its origins are ambiguous and its exact meaning unclear; however, it is a common term used throughout the Commonwealth, including the Caribbean. In this chapter, some connections are made between the term 'giving backchat' and others, particularly those included in the Southern African American lexicon. Eventually, the goal here is to situate giving backchat in the fictional texts of female writers with family roots in the Anglophone Caribbean but with a connection to the Britain. The interest in this topic rests in how these writers use giving backchat as a rhetorical device in their texts and to determine what challenges giving backchat poses to social and cultural structures, regarding girls and women, in societies that can at times display patriarchal and/or masculinist tendencies.

Communication theorist Amy Sheldon observes, "[l]anguage is a major resource which allows children to make their way through the world" and "a powerful medium for teaching cultural novices, such as children, the community's tacit and dominant (that is, hegemonic) prescriptions for constructing gender" (225). Sheldon suggests that children are acculturated through language, learning what is acceptable or not through verbal cues—not just the words but the tone used to express specific feelings or states of mind. For example, in many cultures, gender ideology "gives males the license to argue in direct, demanding, and confrontative ways" whereas "[g]irls and women do so at the risk of being called 'bossy', 'confrontational', 'bitchy', ...or worse for the same behaviours that boys and men can garner praise" (Sheldon 227). In the Caribbean, social and cultural codes designate giving backchat as impertinence and a challenge, specifically by a young woman or girl, to an authority figure. A Caribbean boy might

talk back, but it is only a Caribbean girl who can give backchat because the nature of giving backchat is that it has a negative, gendered connotation. In the Caribbean, a young woman who gives backchat is questioning the culture, which she cannot understand the need for in the current socio-cultural environment. She is also challenging the people and structures maintaining the social, cultural, and familial norms. As some social, cultural, and familial norms are untraceable and seem worthless, they can provide fertile ground for giving backchat because they seem arbitrary. In addition, there is often a gender-bias in the enforcement of norms favouring males. In time, questioning these norms becomes a necessity. In these situations, a young Caribbean woman who gives backchat no longer feels obliged to silently accept without asking why. However, a young woman asking why or daring to speak at all can seem like background noise, which implies that she will not be taken seriously.

Theorist Patricia M. Patterson writes, “[t]hrough the constant humming of the human machine assures us of its proper functioning, feminine cogs are sometimes thought to hum too much” (668). Patterson observes that when women and girls speak, their discourse is considered talking too much. There are many popular cultural references to the chatterbox female, such as Lucy Ricardo from the 1950s American television series *I Love Lucy* (1951-1957), to support Patterson’s contention. The chatterbox image suggests any and every female utterance is background noise—that senseless chatter that is more a nuisance or distraction than a valuable contribution. Their words, however important, are dismissed. Patterson further observes that in mixed-gender social situations, female participants often retreat into socially-imposed silence; girls and women become “ghosts” in these settings (669). A popular cultural image of these silent women is the dutiful wife. Many feminist scholars, most notably bell hooks and Melissa Harris-Perry, have questioned why former First Lady Michelle Obama, an accomplished lawyer

and successful administrator, assumed this image during her husband's two terms as President of the United States when she is a highly intellectual woman who could have surpassed the traditional First Lady role. In *Sister Citizen* (2011), Harris-Perry points out Obama's refusal to accept the traditional roles that Black women are usually cast into when they speak, such as Sapphire or the Angry Black Woman (274). Despite her Ivy League pedigree, her unwillingness to be typecast, and her insistence on marriage equality, Obama received harsh judgment every time she spoke, reaffirming the contention that an intellectual wife does not support the silent, dutiful wife stereotype.

The stereotype of the silent and dutiful wife raises the question of how giving backchat can address this issue of the wilful silencing of women. Giving backchat provides women with the opportunity to be heard in situations in which they are typically ignored simply for being young and/or female. When a young woman gives backchat, particularly in a familial or social setting in which she is expected to remain silent, she is not simply speaking but asserting her right to be heard. Giving backchat can also provide certain groups, such as young Caribbean women, with the opportunity to express their concerns, albeit neither in a welcoming nor supportive forum. One of the major issues with giving backchat as gendered speech is that it is interpreted as insolent discourse.

According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, backchat is a form of response that involves "Rude or cheeky remarks made in reply to someone in authority" ("Backchat"). This definition is quite inadequate as it fails to grasp two elements: intent and reception. While the intention may only be to question or challenge a cultural, social, or familial structure, giving backchat may be, and usually is, received as disrespectful. Giving backchat occurs when a girl or a young woman in a patriarchal society or male-dominated culture interrogates and challenges cultural, social, and/or

familial structures and/or strictures that prove oppressive or repressive without a valid purpose for those controls. While a boy or young man can also give backchat, the impact is not perceived as negatively as when given by a girl or young woman. Overall, giving backchat has a gendered connotation that is not complimentary to the person who is performing this act.

The term backchat could stem from the Hindi word *bātcīt*, *bāchīt*, or *bātacīta*, meaning conversation, which, according to historian Emily Brewer, became British military slang in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (loc. 155 and 51). Backchat is now a colloquial Caribbean term with a gendered connotation. There are several possibilities to explain the migration of this term from the WWI-era military, a decidedly male-centred arena, to every-day Caribbean female-centred discourse. Backchat, in its current iteration, seems to extend back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>; there are a few theories available on its origin. The earliest published reference to backchat is in an article titled “English Underworld Slang” in the theatre trade-journal *Variety* on April 8, 1931. The brief introduction to the article states, “[t]he Cockney idiom, dead except in the English lower classes, usually confuses Americans when up against it for the first time” (63).

Brewer’s *Tommy, Doughboy, Fritz: Soldier Slang of World War I* (2014) links the term backchat to WWI British military slang. As observed earlier, the origin of the term backchat is likely “the Hindi word for conversation, ‘batchit’” (baa cheet) (loc. 155). She also notes that “800,000 Indian soldiers served in the First World War” (loc. 84). When Indian troops joined the conflict, many non-English language terms that may not have been clear to English speakers were probably altered for convenience or perhaps just mispronounced. Brewer writes, “[m]uch soldier slang involved the ironic mispronunciation of foreign words...or the transfer of words from other languages or cultures into common parlance” (loc. 51). Brewer’s research also

indicates that “several words from Hindi...became equally common alternatives to their English counterparts” (loc. 54). Brewer’s contention that most of the Indian soldiers came from the Punjab and the use of Hindi creates another frustrating gap in the research. Punjabis, who come from a region in northwest India near the Pakistan-India border speak an Indo-Aryan language called Punjabi, which is written in the Gurmukhi script associated with the Sikhs (Shackle par. 1-2). Hindi, or Hindustani, is also an Indo-Aryan language and the official language of India. Hindi is written in the Devanagari script, which is influenced by Sanskrit (“Hindi”). In short, Punjabi and Hindi have common origins in an ancient Indo-Aryan language but evolved to the extent that the scripts are unique. The Punjab origin many WWI Indian soldiers and the use of a Hindi term raises other questions as the Punjabi term for conversation is *galabāta*. A review of the definition in the *Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* (1993) reveals that the root, or headword, of *bātcīt* is *bāt*, which is a feminine, verbal term meaning “something said, a word, remark; speech, talk, words; conversation; discussion” (“*Bāt*” 722). A look at the suffix *chīt* reveals that it is also feminine (“*Chīt*” 345).

Brewer is most likely the researcher who comes closest to a logical explanation for the origin of the term backchat and the migration of *bātcīt* from India to the Caribbean if it did in fact originate in India, but there are gaps in her work. While Brewer states that East Indian troops were on the European front during WWI, she does not mention the British West Indies Regiment (BWIR) although Caribbean troops served in the British military as well. Brewer uses the term “Commonwealth” to include only Canada, India, Australia, and New Zealand; she fails to include the soldiers from every other part of the British Empire who served in WWI. However, statistical evidence shows that approximately 16,000 British troops came from the West Indies<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The terms West Indies and Caribbean are often used interchangeably. However, younger Caribbeans are more likely to use the term ‘Caribbean’ because it is not weighted by the colonial history attached to the term West Indies.

by the end of the war (Baker par. 2). These men were members of the BWIR, and they served with troops from other parts of the Empire including India.

Historian Richard Smith places the number of BWIR soldiers serving during WWI at exactly 15,200<sup>2</sup> (248). The BWIR “eventually comprised 12 battalions, enlisting around 15,200 men from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, British Guiana, British Honduras, Grenada, The Bahamas, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Leeward Islands” (Smith 248). Historian C. L. Joseph offers another explanation for the migration of *bācīt* to the Caribbean during the post-WWI period. Joseph notes that of the first contingent of West Indians to volunteer in England for service in the British military during WWI, there were “41 Indian volunteers who had enlisted in Trinidad” (102). These men were immediately repatriated “on the grounds that they were unsuitable and unlikely to become efficient soldiers owing to their ignorance of the English language and difficulties with food” (Joseph 102). However, other Indo-Caribbean men volunteered. There is a high likelihood that Indian and Indo-Caribbean British soldiers came into contact during WWI. Given that possibility, this provides another plausible way for *bācīt* to become a British military slang term from WWI and a possibility for the term’s evolution into giving backchat. With troops from several nations in the Commonwealth gathered on the European front and in other locations, language and terminology moved across national, ethnic, and linguistic lines. Brewer theorises that the soldiers created a hybrid language, or slang, for the practical purpose of having a common language to facilitate communication (loc. 31). She suggests that this hybrid language, spoken only by WWI soldiers, provided them with a sense of unity and identity by marking their common experiences and separating them from the rest of the

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<sup>2</sup> C. L. Joseph’s actual number is 15,204 soldiers and 397 officers for a total of 15,601 BWIR participants in WWI (124).

population (Brewer loc. 43). The term backchat could have been transported to the Caribbean when the soldiers of the BWIR returned to the Caribbean in the 1920s.

Another historical possibility for the migration of the term backchat to the Caribbean, if the theory that it is an Anglicized Hindi term is accepted, is that it was brought by indentured workers from India beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Historian Keith O. Laurence notes that the practice of indenting immigrants in the Caribbean began at the onset of emancipation (141). Laurence, citing public records and the personal letters of colonial representatives, mentions that East Indians and other groups were brought to the Caribbean on mandatory three-year employment contracts (144). In three years, many common expressions could migrate from one language group to another, particularly in the closed environments of the plantations where the emancipated slaves continued to serve under the Apprenticeship System until its cessation in 1838 and where many remained, with indentured workers, after Apprenticeship ended (Laurence 141). Because indenture and apprenticeship coincided, Afro-Caribbean former slaves worked side-by-side with the East Indian immigrants for years (Laurence 141). Therefore, the plantation setting provides another possibility for the evolution of the term *bātcīt* into backchat. The workers had to communicate to accomplish simple tasks and Anglicizing some Hindi terms may have helped them find a common language for basic communication.

Accepting Brewer's WWI explanation or that of indentured Indians in the Caribbean transporting the term *bātcīt* and its subsequent conversion to giving backchat involves the influence of males in both scenarios. The over-emphasis in both explanations on male involvement provides a suitable explanation for the use of the term 'giving backchat' in relation to female articulations and clarifies why the term has a negative, gendered connotation. Perhaps on the plantations, where Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean males were made to feel

emasculated, finding a way to exert some control over girls and women, including their speech, gave these men a sense of power and control. In addition, there is the term's own linguistic gender. The Hindi verb *bācīt* is feminine; linguistically, the term's gender attaches it to female speech. For example, in Latin three of the Pain words, *poeta*, *agricola*, and *nautica*, are masculine but take feminine endings when declined. While these Latin words appear to be feminine because they end in *-a* or *-ae* (singular and plural), they are masculine because of their historical use in relation to males; a poet, a farmer, and a sailor are all typical male employments. Regarding *bācīt*, there may be some relationship between how the term became giving backchat and the perception of women as chatterboxes or gossips. Still, there is one more possible explanation for the transformation of *bācīt* as used by WWI-era military into giving backchat as a predominantly female connotative term. This explanation of how giving backchat migrated from male to female use is easily explained by examining one final group: Indian female indentured migrant workers in the Caribbean.

Gender theorist Rhoda Reddock notes that East Indian women were brought to the Caribbean, specifically Trinidad and Tobago, British Guiana, and Jamaica, beginning in 1845 to meet the Indian government's condition of 12.5 percent female Indian emigrants (225). This accommodation came years after the implementation of a ban on Indian female migrants (Reddock 225). Reddock mentions that from the inception of the Indian indenture program in Trinidad and British Guiana, there were consistent efforts to recruit the "right kind of woman" (226). Reddock, citing Judith Weller and I.M. Cumpston, states that in 1848 Indian men were encouraged to bring their wives to the Caribbean when they migrated under the indenture program (226). The presence of wives and mothers in the Caribbean was intended to promote a

sense of community, family, and stability among the Indian immigrants. Even in numbers as small as 12.5 percent, the community role of females in a diaspora is significant.

Historian Simon Payaslian believes that diasporic women bear “the burden of cultural preservation,” which can occur through “culinary work, quilting, and other hobbies and habits” (45). Payaslian identifies a variety of domestic tasks typically associated with women, whose value, until recent studies on the cultural relevance of such activities, has not been appreciated or given much research attention. Payaslian posits that women, because they are typically less assimilated into host cultures than their male counterparts, “serve as the custodians of their native culture and language” (45). This is a heavy, and often unattainable, role to assume; however, the role of ‘culture bearer’ is the social and familial expectation of immigrant women. Based on the role of immigrant women in diasporic communities, it is quite possible to connect the term backchat, if its roots are truly Indian in origin, to its use in the Caribbean and its gendered connotation. There is a strong likelihood that Indian women transported the term *bātcīt* to the Caribbean, particularly Trinidad, British Guiana, and Jamaica, where East Indian immigration was statistically higher than in other parts of the region. Among Indian women in the Caribbean, *bātcīt* could have evolved from simply meaning conversation to its current use as a gendered term of female transgression.

As mentioned before, there is only one, locatable, formal definition for backchat in the *Oxford Dictionary*, examining only reception while avoiding intent. Also, the availability of critical or theoretical examinations on backchat as gendered Caribbean discourse are currently quite difficult, if not impossible, to locate. The lack of availability of research on the term is surprising as ‘backchat’ is used throughout the Caribbean and in other parts of the Commonwealth. For example, there are news columns titled backchat, yet no explanation is

given about how or why they acquired and continue to carry the title. Dissertations using the term backchat discuss adolescents addressing teachers in a disrespectful manner in secondary school settings, one in England and another in Trinidad and Tobago (Lalani 2004; Williams 2012). It seems to be a given that people throughout the Commonwealth are so familiar with the term that there is little reason to define, explain, or examine why its common use. Backchat simply is. To better define backchat and explore it as a Caribbean socio-cultural phenomenon, connections are drawn between backchat and its African American counterpart, backtalk. Because there are some similarities between African American and Afro-Caribbean chattel slavery, examining the gendered connotations attached to the term backtalk may, in turn, provide some clarity on the phrase giving backchat. Although the terms are similar, it is important to note that they are not entirely synonymous.

The major difference between the two versions of response is that backtalk is typically attached to the behaviour of a child whereas backchat can be given by a female child or adolescent. Although there is little to no research on backchat as a form of discourse, it could be argued that it is a familiar trope in adolescent fiction by Caribbean Anglophone female writers, most notably by Jamaica Kincaid in her novel *Lucy* (1990). Kincaid, through Lucy, distinguishes Caribbeans from African Americans, focusing on each group's ability to issue verbal challenges. While traveling by train from New York to Michigan working as an *au pair* for a wealthy, White, American family, Lucy observes a difference between Afro-Caribbean and African American discourse and behaviour. Lucy states, "On closer observation, they [African Americans] were not at all like my relatives; they only looked like them. My relatives gave backchat" (Kincaid 32). Throughout the novel, protagonist and title character Lucy Potter gives backchat, and, while she is 19 and still technically an adolescent, her intention is not retaliation

but to make several valid observations about situations involving the treatment of young women in social and familial settings that go unresolved. Lucy often gives backchat to her mother, which she does because her mother exerts an unreasonable amount of control over her life. This control includes sending her away to be an *au pair* to financially support the remaining family of five and deciding that Lucy will become a nurse to fund her younger brothers' educations to become doctors. In addition, Lucy's mother's control extends from the verbal to the physical, and, at one point, her mother burns her books.

Postcolonial theorist Helen Tiffin notes that the impact of conquest and colonisation is violence, but that violence is disproportionately enacted against girls and women (912). Tiffin mentions violence that is physical and textual, which could position literature reflecting that complex history as talking texts<sup>3</sup>. These acts of violence are enacted as both punishment and control, singling out the girls and young women who reject social- and familial-imposed silences. The goal of gendered violence is to force girls and young women to learn and accept their designated roles in their families and in society at large. This position usually subordinate girls and women to boys and men, beginning early in life. Novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie observes that societies “spend too much time telling girls that they cannot be angry or aggressive or tough” (loc. 140). Adichie believes that girls are acculturated to worry about being “liked,”—they “have been raised to believe that their being likable is very important and that this ‘likable’ trait is a specific thing” (loc. 137). Boys, Adichie notes, are not subject to such constraints; they are never taught to worry about being liked, so they do not validate likeability. There is an ever-present threat to girls and young women to be quiet or else, hinting at the impending violence against those who refuse to be silent. Lucy gives backchat; she refuses to acquiesce to imposed

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<sup>3</sup> In “The Literary Text as Talking Cure: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Restlessness,” Hilde Staels defines the talking cure as individuals sharing their stories with each other (55).

silences. Lucy's migration to the US separates her from the threat of physical violence; therefore, if Lucy has to be quiet, she wants to know why.

*Lucy* is a novel in which a young woman rails against silence imposed by an, admittedly, overbearing mother and a seemingly well-meaning mistress who embodies White American patriarchy. This novel is one instance of Kincaid using a text to give backchat in situations without simple solutions. There are other examples of giving backchat from Kincaid's work. Literary theorist Helen Scott notes that *A Small Place* (1988) "provides a deeply satisfying response to the racist chauvinism of ruling class Europeans and Americans who used Antigua as their playground" (978). This observation by Scott could be examined in collaboration with the work of theorists Katherine Sugg and Rey Chow, who contend that British hegemony exerted undue influence on Caribbean societies, leading to the need in regional people, but especially regional females, to rebel (158). British colonisation in the Caribbean led to giving backchat to imposed ways of living and thinking, but British hegemony also created an inability to, or perhaps a fear of, verbally challenging those structures. In *A Small Place*, Kincaid questions why the local government maintains a developmental freeze on Antigua. In her one-sided conversation with a tourist, "a North American or European—to be frank, white," Kincaid discusses basic services in Antigua that should be available to Antiguan but are not because of financial mismanagement or the greed of the country's leaders (4). For example, Kincaid informs the tourist that it is "a good thing" that this tourist brought books because the tourist "couldn't just go to the library and borrow some" as Antigua's "splendid library" was destroyed in "The Earthquake" (8). Ten years later when Kincaid writes *A Small Place*, the library still has a sign posted in front stating, "THIS BUILDING WAS DAMAGED IN THE EARTHQUAKE OF 1974. REPAIRS ARE PENDING" (9). The tourist may ask "Why?" but Kincaid does not give

simple explanations because, despite what outsiders may think, the answers are not simple and the current socio-economic problems have a historical basis. The library is just one example; Kincaid follows with the hospital with three doctors that Antiguanians will not patronise. Healthcare is a basic human need, yet Kincaid states that need is not met on the island—particularly “when the Minister of Health himself doesn’t feel well he takes the first plane to New York to see a real doctor” (8). Kincaid’s backchat, which is directed at the “ugly tourist,” is “deeply satisfying” perhaps because she is forthright in expressing the anger that many Caribbeans feel at the stagnation of regional economic development but are unwilling or unable to voice. Also, there is an element of anger directed at this tourist—this person who comes to the Caribbean for the Four S’s—sun, sand, sea, and sex—only to criticise the country’s short-comings, blame the locals, and go home to the “banality and boredom” that initially prompted the little adventure (19). Giving backchat in *A Small Place* is used to draw attention to issues that are not easily resolved and to express frustration at that inability and at the persons and/or structures maintaining the status quo.

Scott also notes that Kincaid’s texts are “writing back against racist colonial commentators” and the current, neocolonial, regional power structure replacing colonial governmental and social systems (979). This new power structure includes foreigners and local politicians; they represent, through a disproportionate allotment of influence, the structure to which Kincaid gives backchat. For Lucy, the colonial power structure is represented in New York by her well-meaning, yet misguided, employer Mariah. Through Mariah’s good intentions, *Lucy’s* audience can witness the long-term effects of colonisation. There is a certain amount of paternalistic behaviour guiding Mariah’s interactions with Lucy from deceiving the young woman into seeing daffodils when she clearly stated that she did not wish to see them, to Mariah

claiming her Native American heritage, which Lucy interprets as the actions of someone who gets “to be the sort of victor who can claim to be the vanquished also” (Kincaid 41). Mariah behaves as though she, as Lucy’s employer, has some rights of ownership over her employee; any claims Mariah makes regarding her egalitarianism or liberalism are belied by her treatment of Lucy—particularly her aggressive attitude when Lucy resigns. Lucy, who originates from a situation in which there are constant attempts to suppress her words and feelings, gives Mariah backchat to assert some control over her life and quits her job with Mariah to change her situation.

Kincaid observes, through Lucy, that there are differences between African American and Caribbean speech. However, there may be some connections between African American and Caribbean patterns of discourse as there are many historical connections between the two regions resulting from the slave trade and European colonisation, which could also suggest that language exchanges occurred as well. African slaves were brought to the Caribbean, and some were eventually transported to North America. Some Africans were enslaved in the Caribbean for years before transportation; at other times, new slaves only transferred ownership in the Caribbean before transportation. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many Caribbean emigrants arrived in the US; some came as migrant workers while others decided to remain. The Caribbean emigrant presence in the US resulted in many cultural exchanges, meaning that linguistic codes such as African American backtalk and Caribbean backchat could share some commonalities with each other as well as with other African American patterns of discourse such as the dozens.

In *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1989), historian Henry Louis Gates, citing Hermese E. Roberts’ *The Third Ear: A Black Glossary* (1971), defines the dozens as “making derogatory, often obscene, remarks about another’s

mother, parents, or family members” (69). Young men play the dozens, which have been popularised in many African American television programs as “Yo mama” jokes as it is often the mothers of the combatants who fall prey to these tests of will and witty repartee. Some common examples of yo mama jokes are ‘yo mama’s hair is so nappy, even Moses couldn’t part it’ and ‘yo mama’s so fat she’s on both sides of the family’. *New York Times* columnist John Tierney, in an interview with Monteria Ivey and Stephen Dweck, co-authors of the book *Snap* (1994), lists some ‘snaps’, which are individual insults that, when delivered in a group and in rapid succession, become the dozens. Tierney recorded some interesting snaps, such as “Your mother is so old, she owes Jesus food stamps” (par. 7). Another snap that Tierney recorded is “His family was so poor, they used to go to Kentucky Fried Chicken to lick other people’s fingers” (par. 14). When playing the dozens, skill, speed, and the ability to remain calm in what could become an intense public situation take precedence over the audience’s amusement.

Gates, citing Clarence Major’s *Dictionary of Afro-American Slang* (1971), notes the object of playing the dozens is “to test emotional strength” (68). It could also be added that the dozens are tests of young men’s will, dating back to the era of US chattel slavery during which a young ‘warrior’s’ manhood could not physically be tested as it normally would have been within his African tribe. Tierney observes that for young men, who can sometimes act in crude and hostile ways, “snapping is one of the more benign outlets for their aggression” and a coming-of-age ritual requiring intellect (par. 12). Tierney’s observation supports the theory that the dozens became an acceptable way of testing a young man’s emotional strength within the American slave society where displays of Black masculinity had to be concealed; its true purpose became an act of subversion. The dozens hid male slave intellect beneath a veneer of humour, entertainment, and intellectual simplicity to prevent outsiders from learning their true intent. For

example, two young male slaves playing the dozens might seem to a White master or overseer like fun and games, but verbal and intellectual exercises like the dozens helped those young men to learn how to defend themselves without resorting to violence as well as how to think critically and quickly, which are skills that African Americans needed to survive as slaves and after emancipation. As Tierney's article focuses solely on young men, this raises questions about young African American women. Tierney does not address the steps girls and women could take to be heard, and what type of preparation they received.

Perhaps giving backchat could also be defined as a test of one's emotional strength if it shares any commonalities with male-gendered speech such as the dozens. Gender theorist bell hooks notes that in the South<sup>4</sup>, African American female children are often punished for talking back. She writes, that punishments "were intended to silence—the child—and more particularly the girl child" (hooks 6). hooks contends that while a male child who talked back could possibly become a preacher, "[t]here was no 'calling' for talking girls, no legitimized rewarded speech" (6). hooks' observation of the difference between adult responses to male versus female child backtalk provides support for gender theorist Amy Sheldon's contention that in "just about all cultures, females and males are theorized as being different from each other" (225). Sheldon believes that this theory of gender difference "reflects a culturally constructed definition of gender as *difference*" (225). Sheldon implies that if an assumption exists of male and female difference, they will be treated differently and adopt different behaviours in response. The social and familial silencing of females, but not necessarily of males, within Southern African American communities, elicits a female response, which is, typically, to remain quiet. Therefore,

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<sup>4</sup> The term South is used here to indicate the southeastern and south-central United States.

types of speech such as backtalk and giving backchat become sites of resistance to forms of oppression.

By stating that a boy who talked back could become a preacher, hooks not only demonstrates how verbal competitions like the dozens teach young men to think quickly but the value of that talent, specifically to a male. A young man who is skilled at playing the dozens could mature and use his verbal skills in a boardroom, on a pulpit, or at a podium. His rhetorical abilities will lead him into a profession and he could, one day, become a community leader. The expectations for young women do not extend to those professional arenas; for example, Lucy is instructed to become a nurse, which she considers a subordinate role to the male doctor role that her brothers are expected to fulfil. The unwelcomed articulations of young women are viewed as defiance and averse to the predestined roles of supportive wife and devoted mother. The dozens, which are historically male-gendered speech, are meant to provide young men with the emotional strength to achieve success whereas backtalk, female-gendered speech, is silenced because it does not fit the expected trajectory of a woman's life.

Verbal acrobatics such as the dozens are tests of intellect and will, demonstrating the combatants' abilities to withstand an onslaught of verbal barbs, but giving backchat has a meaningful purpose as well. Whereas an African American child might talk back to his mother in a misplaced fit of disobedience, a Caribbean female, much like her African American female counterpart, is attempting to establish her place in a patriarchal society and/or in a family mirroring that hegemonic structure. In the process of giving backchat, girls and young women may find that the social and familial systems and structures they initially deemed oppressive or repressive exert far more control over their lives than they originally believed. Giving backchat

cannot simply be reduced to disobedience; instead, it is a valid pattern of discourse aimed at survival in an oppressive system.

hooks addresses backtalk within the context of African American discourse, defining backtalk and talking back in the “southern black community” as a child “speaking as an equal to an authority figure,” which shares some similarities with giving backchat (5). hooks expands her definition to include “daring to disagree and sometimes...just having an opinion” (5). hooks’ discussion also addresses backtalk as gendered speech: the speech of Black women or a woman’s “right speech of womanhood” (6). This form of speech, according to hooks, often goes unheard as in southern, African American communities the voices of Black women “could be tuned out, could become a kind of background music” (6). hooks, like Patterson, believes that female voices are often ignored because female speakers are generally viewed as talking too much; therefore, their discourse as an annoyance or a distraction. Placing emphasis on stereotypes is another factor to consider regarding gender and discourse, placing emphasis on stereotypes. Linguist David Graddol and communication theorist Joan Swann note that stereotypes of male- and female-gendered speech abound, reflecting “popular images of women’s and men’s language, perpetuated through proverbs, jokes, journalism, literature and even by serious language scholars” (2). Graddol and Swann cite examples of gendered-discourse stereotypes, such as comic strip character Andy Capp waiting for his wife to stop speaking, which he views as nagging. For a more classical literature approach to gendered-discourse and stereotypes, Graddol and Swann reference a line from Shakespeare’s comedy *As You Like It* (1603): “Do you know I am a woman? When I think, I must speak” (III.2). Graddol and Swann expound on the nature of these gender-based stereotypes, noting that they “rarely favour women, who are consistently portrayed as chatterboxes, endless gossips or strident nags” when they communicate

with males (2). Because males often marginalise women's voices, hooks believes that "the sharing of speech and recognition took place...among black women" (6). hooks states that Black women offered each other safe spaces to speak freely while being acknowledged and receiving encouragement (6). hooks' observations of Black women's communal support through discussion demonstrates that while speech is gendered and subject to stereotypes, it can also be dynamic, altering in response to changes in social environments.

Giving backchat is gendered because emphasis is placed on female versus male speech in Caribbean discourse; girls give backchat and the connotation is that this act is unacceptable. Unlike backtalk, backchat is not attached to any specific racial group in the Caribbean but may be more common among Caribbean girls and young women of colour. Caribbean girls and young women who give backchat are often described as "womanish," which is defined as "having qualities or characteristics regarded as unsuitable to a strong character of either sex, especially a man" ("Womanish"). Within that definition is a negative connotation attached to the term "unsuitable qualities." Perhaps the unsuitable quality that would earn a young Caribbean woman the sobriquet womanish is her willingness to question why a society or family constructs such fixed roles for her and to demand to know why those roles remain the intact.

Giving backchat questions the social, cultural, and familial systems that place strictures on females but challenge the idea of how language is constructed in a postcolonial society. Postcolonial scholars Bill Ashcroft et al state, "[o]ne of the main features of imperial control is control over language" (7). Language, which should facilitate communication, can become "the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated" (Ashcroft et al 7). There are two possible ways that control over language occurs, such as the imposition of an alien language on cultural groups linguistic systems, and the eradication of indigenous languages

when an alien language is given primacy. Caribbean studies theorist Edward Kamau Brathwaite observes that in the Caribbean both forms of language control occurred. Regarding imperial languages, Brathwaite notes that English, French, Dutch, and Spanish were imperial languages imposed on the archipelago—English comprising the largest regional language group (5). He also states that while Amerindian languages are “active in certain parts of Central America,” in the Caribbean they “were practically destroyed” because “the Amerindians [in the Caribbean] are a destroyed people” (Brathwaite 6). Thus, Amerindian languages, the only indigenous languages of the Caribbean, were eradicated through the drastic reduction in the population of its speakers and then through the imposition of imperial languages. Control over language could also imply the regulation of an individual's speech and thoughts. Caribbean girls and young women always face speech regulation in both social and familial settings. In the public sphere, it is the norm to silence girls and young women for talking too much. In the private sphere, control over language is enacted by exerting some control over the thoughts of young women and girls. Within families, it is not uncommon for girls and young women to be silenced outright for thinking differently and expressing their ideas. These imposed silences can lead to frustration and other negative feelings.

There is another element to backchat that has been avoided throughout this examination of the term. That element is anger. The words ‘frustration’ and ‘question’ are used throughout this chapter to offer some explanations for giving backchat, but there is also a considerable amount of anger involved as well. Young women and girls in the Caribbean are not given the same freedom of expression as their male counterparts; this is a similar phenomenon to hooks’ description of accepting and encouraging African American male speech talking while viewing African American female backtalk as disrespect which needs to be silenced. Prior research

suggests that familial and social restrictions placed on young Caribbean women may be rooted in the Victorian middle-class attitudes permeating Caribbean societies and may bear some responsibility for this manifestation of sexism<sup>5</sup>. While Victorian England greatly influenced Anglophone Caribbean codes of conduct and attitudes, two other regions contribute to regional cultural norms: West Africa and India. West African cultural influence in the Caribbean has a 500-year history and Indian cultural influence has a 200-year history. Both regions are also home to traditionalist, patriarchal cultures; therefore, the possibility exists that masculinist societies of West Africa and India also bear some responsibility for the continued silencing of Caribbean females.

A contemporary example of Caribbean traditionalism could be the social isolation, mistreatment, and threats of physical violence levelled daily at members of the LGBTQ community for publicly claiming non-heteronormative genders and sexualities, which is discussed by Jamaican spoken-word poet Staceyann Chin in her autobiography *The Other Side of Paradise* (2009). Chin describes having a discussion with a Trinidadian male classmate about her sexual orientation, who stated, “it is hard to ignore the fact that you (a woman) could get jumped or raped or killed if somebody suspect [sic] you could be serious about a woman” (244). In the Caribbean, the stigma attached to being a lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, transgender, or queer/questioning often leads to violence, which is linked to heterosexual hegemonies (Skeete 2). Literary theorist Geraldine Skeete observes, “Homophobic attitudes and practices in the Anglophone Caribbean stem from underlying and ingrained heterocentrism and heterosexism” (3). These “underlying and ingrained” factors which aid in the construction of homophobic attitudes also contribute to constructions of masculinity and femininity. The construction of

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<sup>5</sup> See Buxton [Alexander] MA thesis “Resisting Social Indications of Victorianism in the Fictional Texts of Caribbean Women Writers.”

femininity is as “policed” as the construction of masculinity, which can lead to male aggression against lesbians or women suspected of being lesbians (Skeete 3). To that end, Chin describes in graphic detail almost being gang raped in a ladies’ room while living in Jamaica for publicly admitting that she is a lesbian. The scene not only demonstrates that female speech can be powerful as Chin talks her attackers out of raping her but also illustrates that Caribbean masculinity is used to police and control Caribbean females who voice regionally non-traditional attitudes about sexuality.

The social, and often familial, ostracism of the LGBTQ community in the Caribbean is only one example of how regional groups adhere to ideologies indicative of traditionalist and masculinist cultures in the postmodern Anglophone Caribbean. While multiple origins exist for Anglophone Caribbean traditionalist cultures, 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian English attitudes seem to have exerted wide-spread influence. This was the period that consolidated the British Empire and codified ‘Britishness’, or what it meant to be British. It was also during this period that the middle class became the ideal social group, and its attitudes permeated society. Theories proposed by historian Bridget Brereton and post colonist theorist Helen Tiffin suggest that the current conservative attitude in the Anglophone Caribbean could be a form of cultural imitation.

The Victorian period emphasised the middle class and its values. The Anglophone Caribbean Black middle class has a notorious history of aping European culture, and this mimicry extends back to the post-emancipation period in the late 1830s. Brereton writes that in Victorian Trinidad, “[m]iddle class status” depended “on two essential criteria: an occupation which involved no manual labour, and command of European, or British, culture, especially the ability to speak and write correct English” (274). Brereton also notes that “the coloured and black middle class, in the generations after 1838, aspired to move in ‘white’ social circles, to

adopt ‘white’ values,” which seemed to originate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (274). Trinidadian Nobel Laureate V.S. Naipaul made a similar, first-hand observation in his travelogue, *The Middle Passage* (1990). Naipaul writes, “there is a good deal of West Indian writing about the middle class, but the people tend to be so indistinguishable from white,” leading him to conclude that “[i]t is not easy to write about the West Indian middle class” (65). Late Caribbean theorist Edouard Glissant (1928-2011) found similar behaviour among Martinican the middle class. Glissant notes, “Imitation is the rule (imitation of the French model), and any departure is considered a crime” (7). Late St. Lucian Nobel laureate Derek Walcott (1930-2017) also explored the nature of Caribbean culture noting, “Perhaps powerlessness leaves the Third World, the ex-colonial world, no alternative but to imitate those systems offered to or forced on it by the major powers” (5). Unlike Tiffin, who states that colonisation is responsible for Caribbean social, cultural, and familial structures and strictures, Walcott, like Brereton, notes that West Indian culture actively seeks to imitate, procreating its mimicry (6). While the influence of Indian and West African cultures cannot be ignored, it is also reasonable to state that imitating the behaviour of (former) European colonisers is a consistent pattern throughout the Caribbean.

To arrive at the deduction that because the Anglophone Caribbean middle class is fascinated with European, and now American, culture this social group mimics even those foreign social attitudes that might seem stunted or even regressive is not difficult. Imitation also takes the form of intra-racial prejudices and classism, both of which could be subdivided into additional topics such as religion, geography (Where does your family live?), level of education, and family history. Tiffin writes that “Anglo-Victorian middle-class” provided “values with which an educated Caribbean middle-class were so deeply imbued” (912). For Tiffin, Anglophone Caribbean mirroring of Victorian, middle-class behaviour is not solely mimicry but

the result of the historical “entrapment/erasure” of the “Caribbean voice and body” within the “European script” (912). Tiffin does not mention the African, East Indian, or Amerindian voices that were silenced during the European colonisation project, creating an impression that the non-European cultures that contributed to creating Caribbean culture have somehow been subsumed and forgotten in the making of this new culture. Perhaps ignoring or avoiding the existence of the originals is also an inheritance from imperial Europe.

Victorian England, as a historical period and a geographical location, also had a complicated history of dealing with women and respecting their rights. Tiffin notes that an element of the Victorian legacy to the Anglophone Caribbean middle class is one of sexual repression, resulting in the “denial of female sexuality” and efforts by Blacks to “‘breed out’ blackness” (912). Trinidadian novelist Merle Hodge gives an example of this concept of whitening through intermarriage in the Anglophone Caribbean middle class in her adolescent novel, *Crick, Crack Monkey* (1970). In the novel, the protagonist Tee is constantly reminded by her late mother’s sister, Aunt Beatrice, that if it hadn’t been for her father’s ‘blackness,’ Tee would have looked like the maternal family’s “White Ancestress” (81). Despite the family’s efforts to the contrary, Tee’s late mother single-handedly manages to ‘breed blackness’ back into the family.

Among the Victorian middle class, women served the purpose of maintaining family ties through marriage and reproduction. Typically, middle-class, Victorian women married men of the same or a higher social class; after marriage, they took on the roles of wives and mothers while promoting the Christian values. Victorian middle-class women also functioned under a persistent veil suppressing female sexuality in societies that openly encouraged male sexual autonomy. A quick review of English marriage law during the Victorian period, including the

Marriage and Divorce Bill of 1857 or the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, can confirm women's limited rights in Victorian England. The Matrimonial Causes Act, while implementing a clear delineation between Church and State by declaring marriage a contractual obligation rather than solely an ecclesiastical one, still displayed a marked gender bias. A husband could petition for divorce based solely on adultery, but a wife could only petition if adultery was committed in conjunction with one of the following offenses: incest, bigamy, rape, sodomy, bestiality, or cruelty (Nelson 114). Thus, the onus was on the wife as the petitioner to prove her case.

This antiquated way of thinking and living could frustrate young women in the contemporary period. It could make them angry enough to question 'why' and to demand a reasonable explanation that extends beyond 'because'. Giving backchat provides an outlet for a young woman to express that anger—to address her rage in a manner that provokes a solution. An individual who is oppressed, frustrated, and ignored by family and society can cope with those daily aggravations by challenging those social and familial structures that she does not understand and hope that her voice is heard and not relegated to the realm of background noise. Although it would be easy to claim that all Caribbean women must do to have their voices heard is to start giving backchat—verbally challenging the status quo—this statement is too simplistic. There are many complex social and familial systems and structures with historical bases silencing females in general to expect that one, simple solution could have a strong, life-changing impact. As hooks demonstrates, backtalk is only effective if it is not silenced, but hooks also states that girls and young women are often silenced. Challenging the status quo can and has been done, but there is another method for a woman to have her voice heard. Caribbean women historically used writing to express their displeasure with silencing.

Feminist philosopher Hélène Cixous, in “The Laugh of Medusa” (1976) states that historically, writing has been driven by a masculinist, capitalist economy “where woman has never her turn to speak” (879). Cixous challenges women, asking “[a]nd why don’t you write?” (876). Cixous notes,

writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures (879).

Although Cixous provides some valid explanations for women not writing, it is important to add that forced silencing of women in social and familial settings which maintains their silence, or absence, from writing. Imposed silence can make women hesitant to embrace the pen and the written word. Also, women who are not middle class economically and socially, not Western, and not White are typically in a position in which writing is most beneficial but also in the position in which they often cannot afford to ‘write back’. Although Cixous, like many White, Western, middle-class feminists, does not consider these disadvantaged women, it would be intriguing to read how she would address their concerns.

Novelist Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) stated almost 100 years ago that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (3). Any woman of colour who works and has financial responsibilities might wonder what woman Woolf was referencing. Woolf, like other White, British middle-class female writers of her time and beyond, was unduly enmeshed in the ‘gender problem’—that age-old battle between men and women for equality, or perhaps supremacy. Woolf, like Cixous, forgets the woman who does not look like her or enjoy the same privileges she enjoys. Neither Woolf nor Cixous consider a woman who does not have the time to write because she must earn a living wage. They disregard the woman who is not

independently wealthy and must designate every earned penny to trivialities such as sustenance and shelter. Feminists like Woolf and Cixous also refuse to acknowledge that there is a woman incapable of writing because, instead of dedicating her life to academic pursuits, she is engaged in the daily struggle for survival.

Late poet Audre Lorde (1934-1992) observed, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (112). Lorde implies that working within a system of oppression and utilising its tools as weapons against that system will not alter it. Writing in the British tradition could be viewed as the master’s tool as this style of writing is heavily influenced by regional ideas of form, style, and construction. Caribbean women’s texts take a different approach to writing as they descend from cultures with oral traditions, demonstrating the influence of storytelling on their home societies. Caribbean women’s writing seeks to create spaces for Cixous’ “springboard of subversion”; however, the authors of these texts do not require Woolf’s “money and a room of [their] own” to write. The texts of Caribbean female writers may employ the master’s tools, but they are used in a different manner than traditionally intended.

Writing provides women a venue to speak, to challenge, to demand, and, sometimes, to rail against inequalities that seem insurmountable. For many women, their texts are their sole means of self-expression and voice. However, it is important to mention that there are other historically-imposed forces involved in many women’s ability to be heard. In this space between class, culture, religion, society, and family, the Other woman writes. Historically, she worked on the forefront of social movements, but her story is often untold because it is never included in master narratives. This woman has often been the lone voice addressing a myriad of social,

economic, and/or educational concerns, but she is rarely heard. Her words are ignored, dismissed as background noise—Patterson’s humming—simply because she is not male, is from the ‘wrong’ racial group, or is not a member of the ‘right’ social class. She is the girl, young woman, or even grown woman who is typically accused of talking back—of challenging systems that inhibit her. Therefore, when she writes, it is only natural that she continues to question and challenge those systems that maintain gender biases in her text. This Other woman is the female Caribbean writer, and, in her texts, she is always giving backchat.

**CHAPTER II:**

**TO BE HEARD:**

**GIVING BACKCHAT IN CARIBBEAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

**A Few Words from the Two Marys: Autobiography during  
Slavery and Post Emancipation in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Black British Writing**

I will say truth to the English people. I tell it, to let English people know the truth.  
from *The History of Mary Prince* 38

The female autobiography, which has a long history in the Caribbean usually takes the form of diaries, journals, and travelogues. Two well-known examples are the writings of Sor Juana (1651-1695) from Mexico<sup>6</sup> and Lady Maria Nugent<sup>7</sup> (1771-1834) writing from Jamaica. The significance of these texts is that they were written by European women living in the Caribbean or by European Creoles<sup>8</sup>, some of whom were invested in promoting the imperial mission, albeit in a “subordinate role” (Brereton 145). Non-White and non-European women were not included in studies of Caribbean female writing until the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century perhaps because it was not until this time that Caribbean women of colour began writing and getting published. Bridget Brereton notes that historically, “Black and Indian women were largely silent, in literary forms, until well into the twentieth century,” which could be directly related to their limited educational opportunities (145). In the Caribbean, because “educational opportunities for women were limited,” it was unlikely that many free women of colour were educated (Shepherd 74). The literary silence of women of colour in the Caribbean pre-20<sup>th</sup> century is not unusual as slaves were rarely taught to read and write and free Blacks were not

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<sup>6</sup> Juana Inés de Asbaje y Ramírez de Santillana or Juana Inés de la Cruz was a self-taught 17th-century Mexican nun and scholar. The illegitimate daughter of a Spanish captain and a Criollo woman, Sor Juana joined the Order of St. Jerome at age 18, where she remained writing and studying until her death.

<sup>7</sup> Born Maria Skinner to a Loyalist family in New Jersey, Lady Nugent married Sir George Nugent (1757-1849), who became Governor General of Jamaica (1801-1806). Lady Nugent’s journal of her experiences in Jamaica and India were published in 1907.

<sup>8</sup> Although the term creole has many meanings, here the term ‘Creole’ is used as a noun referring to Caribbean-born people of solely European descent. The term Creole can also be used to refer to people of African and Spanish or French descent or a language that is a combination of other languages. H. Adalai Murdoch describes the term Creole as resulting from discursive and locational slippages. According to Murdoch, “a creole person can be either white or black, colonizer or colonized, as the term articulates an essential ambiguity that both mediates and ruptures the strategies of containment that have driven the dominant designations of difference that have been the traditional corollary of the colonial encounter” (254).

likely to be published. The lack of education among slaves and minimal freedom of expression in writing among free Blacks were especially true for females. Female slaves in the Caribbean were expected to work and to reproduce; this forced reproduction of female slaves, in addition to their chattel status, denied them opportunities.

In some colonies, there were no public schools, and, in those colonies with public education, free children of colour were not allowed to attend with White children. Education in the British West Indies before emancipation was limited to private primary schools solely for White children, and the British government did not establish the Negro Education Grant “to provide financial support for education” aimed at educating the children of newly-emancipated slaves until 1833 (Spry Rush 23). Historian Anne Spry Rush’s research on education in the Caribbean reveals that the Negro Education Grant was “inadequate to the task of providing elementary schooling for all children of freed slaves” although “the grant was considerable” (23). Before emancipation on some islands, most notably St. Kitts, free children of colour were not allowed public education although their parents paid taxes (Shepherd 70). When free Afro-Caribbean children were sent to Europe to school, the focus was “on ‘genteel’ pastimes such as music and dancing” (Shepherd 74). The children sent to Europe for education before and during the Victorian period were middle class, which explains the emphasis on music and dancing in lieu of instruction in more practical employment-focused subjects. Gender historian Carol Dyhouse confirms that the “practice of educating middle-class girls in the first half of the [19<sup>th</sup>] century resembled (if it did not represent) a kind of decorative packaging of consumption goods for display in the marriage mart” (177). Thus, education in Europe for Caribbean children was as limited as it was locally during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There are other examples of women or girls of colour receiving educations to prepare them for “feminine occupations” (Shepherd 74). For

example, in Grenada in 1825, The Society for the Education of the Poor opened a school for Afro-Caribbean girls to make them more industrious, teaching students needlework and embroidery, which could lead to future employment and a steady income (Shepherd 74).

Historian Simon Morgan presents a different view of female education in the Victorian period. While Morgan admits that many Victorians

believed that women had no need for a vigorous intellectual training,...a growing number of men and women believed that the education usually received by girls of the more affluent classes was inadequate, and that this problem affected not only the women themselves, but also their future husbands, families and the nation as a whole (36).

Morgan also points out that many education reformers like Sarah Stickney Ellis thought that a girl's education should equip her for life (36). Therefore, some education reformers, such as sisters Emily and Maria Shirreff, made a connection "between intellect and morality" (Morgan 37). In other words, a woman who was more intellectually capable could exercise a greater moral influence over her family and society. Based on these examples of the narrow view of educating children of colour and females, the likelihood of narratives by non-White Caribbean women pre-20<sup>th</sup> century was slim. This group had fewer opportunities to write and be published largely due to a lack of education but also because of limited time and inadequate finances.

In contrast to slave women, free women of colour in the Caribbean were in a better position in many regards. Historian Verene Shepherd's research indicates that "[f]ree people of colour formed the middle group in Caribbean slave societies" (66). Laws aimed at enforcing legal and social restrictions impacted both genders but more so free Afro-Caribbean male elites than females (Shepherd 69). Although there were several restrictions placed on free women of colour and they experienced segregation, for the most part they seem to have thrived in

Caribbean slave societies, due in part to their free status, which separated them from chattel slaves. In addition, because many of them were descended from Europeans, they enjoyed certain privileges that pure African slaves did not. Therefore, if a text was written by a non-European in the Caribbean, members of this group would have been the most likely to produce it.

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, for the reasons already mentioned and because female writers were not published as much as males, there was little encouragement for black women to write. As the century progressed, there were exceptions to this rule but not in the Caribbean, as in the Americas and Europe most fiction and nonfiction produced by non-White female writers was by African American women. However, in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an autobiography was written by a Black woman from the Caribbean, becoming the first Afro-Caribbean female slave narrative and following in the tradition of famous 18<sup>th</sup>-century men who experienced British chattel slavery in the Caribbean<sup>9</sup>. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was marked by notable events reflecting the global impact of colonisation: slavery, abolition, emancipation, and empire building. During this period, autobiography was one of the few literary genres available to Caribbean female writers—particularly those of African descent who experienced, directly and indirectly, a history of chattel slavery. It also became the preferred medium of the abolitionist movement in Britain because slaves could tell their own stories without too much external influence. Autobiography was the genre offering 19<sup>th</sup> century female writers the most autonomy, agency, voice. Because women were not encouraged to speak—to share their stories—these writers were, by extension, giving

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<sup>9</sup> The most popular British slave narratives before Mary Prince were written by men. Ukawsaw Gronniosaw (1710?-1774?) of Nigeria wrote *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Live of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, as Related by Himself* (1770). West African Ignatius Sancho's (1729-1780) *The Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho* (1782) were compiled and published after his death. Ottobah Cugoano (1757-?) self-published *Narrative of the Enslavement of Ottobah Cugoano, a Native of Africa* (1787). The most well-known of this group of autobiographers was Nigerian Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797), who wrote *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789).

backchat, which has a long history among Caribbean women that predates the actual term and its use when referencing gendered speech.

Sociologist Anton Allahaar posits that an autobiography provides a historical account of the “society and community that shaped and nurtured her/him” (127). Autobiography “if properly written...can give valuable insight into the social worlds of the various storytellers” (Allahaar 127). In addition, autobiographical writing by women of colour from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century placed emphasis on systems of oppression—specifically the social, familial, and even personal ramifications of chattel slavery. By the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, those systems of oppression marginalising women of colour still demonstrated the intersection of race and gender. Therefore, when a woman of colour in the 19<sup>th</sup> century wrote an autobiography, she was not simply telling her life story but providing anecdotal accounts with valuable insight into her time, location, class, and socio-economic status. Non-White, female, 19<sup>th</sup> century autobiography authors were, as literary theorist Johnnie M. Stover states, “attacking...systems” (“Nineteenth-Century” 134). In addition, these female writers crafted texts reflecting their origins and experiences. Because they failed “to follow the white-male autobiographical tradition” or to mimic “the black-male slave narrative tradition,” their texts “smacked of rebellion” (Stover *Rhetoric* 25). Thus, female autobiography was a tool used to challenge social, cultural, and familial systems, and there are two, 19<sup>th</sup> century autobiographies by Anglophone Caribbean female writers: the slave narrative of Mary Prince and Mary Seacole’s travelogue, that challenge these systems of oppression.

Throughout her slave narrative, Prince’s recounts situations in which she challenged her masters and mistresses in response to the various injustices imposed on her. Because Prince was legally chattel and not entitled to freedom of body and by extension speech, her entire narrative

could be issuing a challenge. In addition to questioning her slave status, Prince's autobiography asserts her personhood, demanding to be recognised as an autonomous human being rather than as a breathing piece of property. This theme of humanity and the power of the voice runs throughout Prince's narrative, making hers the only independently-expressed text of a female chattel slave from the Caribbean.

Seacole's narrative shares with Prince's text the inhibiting factor of race. The social restrictions placed on Black women became particularly frustrating for Seacole in England, where she assumed that being a British subject outweighed any other affiliation. Seacole was born and lived her entire life as a free woman, but she was still a woman of African descent from the Caribbean and English society often did not let her forget her race and origins. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was not common for Afro-Caribbean women to produce travelogues; the only other travelogue by a woman of colour written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* (1850) by Nancy Gardner Prince. In her travelogue, Seacole describes instances of posing verbal challenges, usually in situations in which she was made to feel that her race was a detriment to her otherwise impeccable character.

In *The History of Mary Prince a West Indian Slave* (1831), Mary Prince, a former Antiguan slave, recounts her experiences in bondage, highlighting the abuses she received from all of her former masters; emphasising her desire to be a free woman; and voicing her story in her way. Prince's *History* was written under interesting circumstances, beginning with her expulsion from the home of her owners, Mr. and Mrs. Wood. In 1828, Prince, with the consent of her husband, chose to go to England with the Woods under the mistaken belief that she would receive treatment for her rheumatism. There is also the possibility that Prince believed that in England she would automatically be a free woman most likely because the commonly-held belief

among English-speaking slaves transported to the UK was that they were free on arrival. The ruling by Lord Mansfield, the Lord Chief Justice in *Somerset v. Stewart* (1772) caused this confusion as it was interpreted to mean that all slaves in the UK were free. After Prince was thrown out of the Wood's home, she found her way to the Anti-Slavery Society, which in turn introduced her to a Society member who was also an editor named Thomas Pringle<sup>10</sup>. By 1828, Pringle and his wife employed Prince in their home and in 1831 she dictated her narrative to Susanna Strickland (1803-1885), later Susanna Moodie the Canadian writer. Prince's *History* went through three editions, all published in 1831, and led to two libel cases. The first libel case, *Pringle v. Cadell* (1833) was filed by Pringle against *Blackwood's Magazine* for publishing an article by *Glasgow Courier* editor James McQueen questioning the veracity of Prince's text. Pringle won this suit. The second libel case, *Wood v. Pringle* (1833), was filed against Pringle by John Wood, Prince's last legal owner; Pringle lost this case despite Prince's damaging testimony against Wood. While some scholars such as Sarah Salih believe that Prince remained in England, there is some doubt that she would have if she could return to Antigua (xi). The *Slavery Abolition Act* of 1833 emancipated Caribbean slaves as of August 1834; however, Caribbean slaves were still indentured to their former masters until 1838. As Prince's life after the publication of her *History* and the Wood libel suit is unknown, there is a possibility that she returned to Antigua to re-join her husband if she survived.

Prince has been described as “a rebel in spirit and action” whose “life story is partly a struggle against erasure” (Allahar 128). Prince's autobiography became a very popular abolitionist text, gaining her a tenuous freedom from her current master and mistress while in England, and she became the *cause célèbre* of the English abolitionist movement at the time of

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Pringle (1789-1834) was a Scottish poet, writer, abolitionist, and secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society. He was also the editor of Mary Prince's autobiography.

its publication. Twenty-six years later, another Caribbean woman of colour wrote an autobiography. Mary Seacole's *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857) was the second published travelogue by a Black female writer and the first by a Caribbean woman of colour. *Wonderful Adventures*, Seacole's account of her travels beginning in her twenties and extending to her stint as a volunteer nurse and hotelier during the Crimean War, was published a year after Seacole returned from the Crimea. Seacole, at the time, was in bankruptcy court with her business partner Thomas Day, and the publication, in addition to financial support from kind benefactors, left her a comfortable, if not well-off, woman. She remained in England until her death in 1881.

Although much has been written about Prince, Seacole, and their contributions to literature, little attention has been given to the fact that by publicising their personal stories, they were challenging the British master narrative in a variety of ways. They were both born in the Caribbean, and, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were no other Caribbean-born female writers of colour aside from Prince and Seacole. Neither could be considered middle class by pre-Victorian or Victorian standards, which is significant as many 19<sup>th</sup> century British writers were middle class. Prince was born into slavery and would have remained a slave had she returned to the Caribbean in 1833 when her *History* was published. Seacole, while born free, was the illegitimate daughter of a Scottish soldier stationed in Jamaica and a mixed-race Jamaican woman. Both women were of African descent and being Black in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Caribbean was not synonymous with becoming a writer much less a successful one. Because of their differences from what would have been considered the average 19<sup>th</sup> century, British writer, Prince and Seacole defy the model of the colonial, male master narrative. In addition, race, gender, and a burgeoning sense of Caribbean identity heavily influence their texts although both women were conditioned to

identify themselves as British subjects. This is particularly true for Seacole who has a strong sense of service to country, which is a recurring theme in her text. As Black Caribbean women living in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the socio-cultural implications of those designations imply, Prince and Seacole do not represent the typical, British, 19<sup>th</sup>-century autobiography writer.

To provide further evidence for the claim that Prince and Seacole's autobiographies challenge the British master narrative, there are some issues that should be raised about their texts to better understand how, as Caribbean female autobiography writers who are also of African descent, they disrupt the classifications associated with this genre. Self-naming is a relevant issue; neither Prince nor Seacole discusses how she refers to herself, which raises an additional issue of self-identity versus imposed identity. Prince's autobiography, although claiming to be her true-life story, may not present an accurate depiction of her voice because the possibility exists that it was subjected to heavy-handed editing by her amanuensis, Susannah Strickland, and/or her editor, Thomas Pringle. There is also the possibility that Prince self-edited through omission. The gaps—those marked absences in her text—could represent Prince asserting her right to tell her story in her way. The case of Mary Seacole is similar. Seacole's narrative seems too cut-and-dried, raising the question of whether she disclosed every detail or worked as her own editor to remove any information she did not wish to reveal. Seacole, more so than Prince, had a financial motive in mind when writing her autobiography, which could suggest that she tells her life story in the most appealing manner so that her British audience will want to read it as opposed to describing the events as they occurred. Because Prince and Seacole autobiographies pose challenges to the British, colonial master narrative, developing a discussion involves examining the effects of gender and agency on the discursive pattern of these texts.

Agency is an important issue in women's writing, which is influenced by the historical time and the social constraints at play during that period. Literary theorist Suzanne Juhasz writes, “[a]utobiography as a formal literary genre has usually been man’s work, versions of autobiography have traditionally been associated with women—diaries and correspondence, for example” (663). As these are 19<sup>th</sup> century texts, there were likely impositions of White European femininity ideals on the texts by the editors and, occasionally, by Prince and Seacole themselves. These impositions stem from the 19<sup>th</sup> century belief in a masculine public sphere and a private feminine sphere; ideally, a woman’s place was in the home whereas a man operated best outside the home. Dyhouse states that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there existed an “ideal of the dependent woman confined to the domestic circle” (175). Morgan notes that

family and home were the main starting points in most accounts of women’s duties and many writers, particularly before the 1840s and 1850s, believed that the majority of women would spend their lives in a domestic environment (37).

This belief is firmly entrenched in a middle-class ideology in which men worked outside the home and women within to the exclusion of working women of any class. Morgan, citing Sir Edward Baines’ biography of his father Edward Baines<sup>11</sup>, notes that the “perfect middle-class citizen was therefore a man of business and thus distinguished from the leisured aristocrat” (33). This ideal man “was also civilized, able to enrich the society in which he moved and to fulfil the offices of husband and father, so providing the perfect example to another generation of active citizens” (Morgan 33). Although Baines addresses the ideal middle-class male, by the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this idea of the breadwinner husband and domestic wife began to trickle down to the working class (Dyhouse 184).

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<sup>11</sup> Edward Baines (1774-1848) was an author, politician, and the editor/proprietor of the *Leeds Mercury*.

Dyhouse notes that the image of the ideal couple cast men whose wives worked as incapable of supporting their families (184). Both Morgan and Dyhouse admit that the negative connotation attached to working women excluded single women with no other means of financial support. Middle-class women without family financial support, an example of which is the real-life Brontë sisters, could either rely on the sporadic generosity of their wealthier relatives or take up a genteel employment such as becoming governesses. Another option was to enter the public sphere and launch a writing career. The act of writing with the goal of publication is geared towards the public sphere not the private; therefore, autobiography, which from a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective would be viewed as an asexual written form, had a gendered connotation during the 19<sup>th</sup> century because autobiographical writing “is the published record of a life that has claims to the attention of the public world” (Juhasz 663). Therefore, by choosing the autobiographical genre, which was largely the male writer’s purview during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Prince and Seacole exhibit agency and challenge the perception of autobiography, whether slave narrative or travelogue, as a male-gendered literary genre.

Referencing public and private spheres as gendered domains, historian Dror Wahrman cites an article by 19<sup>th</sup> century novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton originally published in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1831. In this comparative essay on “‘the spirit of society’ in England and France” Bulwer-Lytton wrote, “the proper sphere of woman is private life, and the proper limit to her virtues, the private affections” (Wahrman 396). Bulwer-Lytton’s observation suggests that because in Britain during the 19<sup>th</sup> century a woman’s place was in the home, any attempts she made to insert herself into the public, masculine sphere—particularly as a writer—would not be socially accepted. However, this observation also ignores the realities of the time. Morgan disagrees with the belief that the public and private spheres were entirely separated in the 19<sup>th</sup>

century. Instead, Morgan believes that a review of the various roles women occupied during the pre- and Victorian periods suggests that there is no clear distinction between public and private spheres (3). For example, women took on philanthropic duties by joining mission societies outside the home. In Leeds alone, there were four popular mission societies with a strong female presence<sup>12</sup> (Morgan 77). Because women were “less likely to be involved in ‘commercial pursuits’” they could commit to spending time and effort on non-domestic projects, making them ideal for mission work (Morgan 79). While Morgan’s contention accounts for women who brought their skills from private to public spheres, it does not consider the social and familial pressures that could be exerted on women who chose to step out of their solely-private roles and into more public personas by taking paid work. Perhaps the relegation of women to the home and the negative connotation attached to women ‘flaunting’ themselves in public, even in literary form, is one of the reasons why Victorian female writers often adopted *noms de plume*, for example Mary Ann Evers became George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë published as Currer Bell.

Mary Prince may not have had the luxury of adopting a *nom de plume* for a variety of reasons, but Prince scholars and researchers raise some questions about her name or naming. Literary theorist A. M. Rauwerda suggests that there is a possibility that Prince’s name is not hers (397). Rauwerda further states, “Prince’s name appears in various forms (Mary Prince, Mary Princess of Wales, Mary James, and Molly Wood) each of which reflects the objectives of different editors and owners” (397). Prince’s editor, Thomas Pringle, in one of his many, intrusive and, largely, unnecessary<sup>13</sup> notations writes, “[i]n the printing of this narrative we have retained Mary’s paternal name of Prince” (Pringle “Footnote” 29). Prince was not a paternal

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<sup>12</sup> Leeds Religious Tract Society (1805); the Leeds City Mission (1836); the Leeds Town Mission (1837); and the Leeds Domestic Mission (1844).

<sup>13</sup> Pringle’s notations seem unnecessary because writing an autobiography should be the author’s opportunity for uninterrupted self-expression or confession. However, Pringle is so concerned with protecting Prince from detractors that he often provides information that does not contribute to Prince’s.

surname so much as the given slave name of her father. Pringle also mentions that Prince was initially named Mary Princess of Wales by her first owner because “[i]t is a common practice with the colonists to give ridiculous names of this description to their slaves” (Pringle “Footnote” 29). Late historian Peter Fryer’s (1927-2006) examination of the lives of Blacks in Britain provides some support for Pringle’s claim. He writes, “[i]t was the fashion for black slaves owned by titled families, by high-class prostitutes, and by others with such pretensions to be given high-sounding Greek or Roman names” (Fryer 24). Although Fryer’s focus is on the naming patterns of Black slaves in England during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, he also mentions that some of these slaves were the property of West Indian planters. While Pringle provides an account of the names that Prince has been given, he is protective of the names of many of the former owners that Prince accuses of a variety of physical and emotional atrocities, stating he has abbreviated their names because

to hold them up more openly to human reprobation could no longer affect themselves, while it may deeply lacerate the feelings of their surviving and perhaps innocent relatives, without any commensurate public advantage (Pringle “Preface” 4).

Rauwerda does not accept this explanation, and, on closer observation, it does seem inadequate and fundamentally discriminatory. Pringle inadvertently maintains the custom of the time, which was to accept the word of Whites over that of Blacks.

Salih suggests that Pringle’s other possible motive for excluding the full names of Prince’s previous owners except the Woods may have been to prevent a libel suit (xxxii). However, it is more likely that Prince is not allowed to name her abusers because they are White and she is a slave not because they may have innocent relatives or because of libel. In addition, there is a strong likelihood that Pringle felt a libel suit was improbable based on the character

references he provides on Prince's behalf from both Antigua and England in the Appendix to her *History*. In addition, the *History* was published three times in 1831 by Pringle, but the two libel suits were not filed against Pringle until 1833 (Salih xxviii). In Appendix Three of the *History*, there is an extract from Prince's testimony in the second libel case, *Wood v. Pringle* (1833). Prince states on the witness stand that the "history of her life was written down by Miss Strickland at her request; she told the lady the truth" (Pringle 102). Salih notes that Prince testified to sharing the details regarding her extra-marital sexual relationships with Susanna Strickland (x). Salih assumes that Strickland, "for obvious reasons, did not write them down" (x). Specifically, Salih believes that Strickland was involved in an Anti-Slavery Society strategy to transform Prince, who admits to being a sexually-active woman, into a victim of her various masters' lust (x).

Sociologist Norman R. Yetman, who compiled selections from the Federal Writer's Project (FWP) Slave Narrative Collection, states that "the antebellum slave narratives had been employed primarily as abolitionist propaganda and represented a skewed sample of the total slave population" (1-2). Yetman's observation points to a purpose for collecting antebellum slave narratives that is neither historical nor altruistic. The following quote is included before the Preface to literary theorist Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s collection *The Slave's Narrative* (1985), there is the following quote:

"Things for the Abolitionist to Do,"

Speak for the Slave, . . .

Write for the Slave, . . .

They can't take care of themselves.

*The New England Anti-Slavery Almanac For 1841* (iv).

This statement from the Anti-Slavery Almanac points to a paternalistic mindset among abolitionists that is no different from that of the slave owners. The statement also suggests that abolitionists would do anything they believed necessary and in slaves' best interests, such as writing and speaking for those slaves. Because slaves could easily become pawns in the abolition movement, slaves' narratives were "suspect because of the direct political uses to which abolitionists put those unremitting indictments of the 'peculiar institution'" (Gates v-vi).

While abolitionists' motivations are a strong likelihood, Salih fails to recognise other possibilities regarding the gaps in Prince's narrative. Prince does not admit to disclosing every intimate detail of her life to Strickland; there is a distinct possibility that Prince did not completely trust Strickland and offered only partial information. A quick perusal of slave narratives collected by the FWP do not demonstrate inconsistencies but an unwillingness to completely disclose. In Yetman's collection, only eight out of thirty interviewees were Black or African American (358). There is a strong possibility that former slaves were still incapable of fully disclosing because they may not have trusted the White interviewers or they may have been afraid to trust the motives of Whites in general. In addition, a closer perusal of the narratives gives the impression that slavery was not as detrimental to the slaves as believed. There are few recollections of beatings, sexual abuse, or torture; incidents of cruelty are recalled anecdotally rather than in detail. One former slave, Julia Brown from Georgia, discusses receiving a beating with a cowhide whip by her mistress and that she "never wore anything but a cotton dress, a shimmy, and drawers" (Yetman 46). While Brown admits that slaves "were treated in most cases like cattle," she later states that "[s]ome of the white folks was very kind to their slaves" (Yetman 47 and 48). Another former slave, Doc Quinn, does not discuss slavery. Instead, he recounts his days as a member of what could be described as a raiding gang directed at agitating

former slaves under the leadership of a Colonel Baker, who he states, “did more for the white folks of dis country dan any other man” and “iffen it hadn’t been for him, de white folks couldn’t have lived in this country. De Negroes was so mean” (Yetman 245).

While some facts are disclosed in these African American slave narratives, they lack specific details about slaves’ personal experiences, providing general information rather than complete accounts with supporting details. In addition, few of the narratives indict the White or Native American slave owners; instead, the respondents give accounts of the ways in which owners showed their slaves kindness. The rather complimentary tone of these narratives suggest that the recollections are tempered by the advanced ages of the respondents, the passage of time, and by interviewer expectations. The former slaves probably stated what they thought the interviewers wanted to hear because many of them were physically and economically vulnerable at the time of the interviews—particularly those who traded chattel slavery for sharecropping on a former master’s land.

There is another possibility that Prince did disclose intimate details to Strickland but asked her not to record every detail. Prince admits that religion had become a large part of her life during her final years in Antigua. After attending a Methodist meeting at a plantation called Winthrope, she “felt sorry for [her] sins...cried the whole night, but...was too much ashamed to speak” (Prince 28-29). This incident leads Prince to actively seek religious instruction without permission from the Woods. Prince’s commitment to leading a life of faith is so strong that when a free man named Daniel James asks her to marry him, she “would not say yes till he went to church with [her] and joined the Moravians” (Prince 30). Her religious conversion may have made Prince feel embarrassed about the extra-marital sexual relationships she had prior to her marriage to James and joining the Church.

Salih's assessment does not entertain the possibility of Prince having more agency as the *bona fide* writer of her text. Granted, given the various examples of heavy-handed editing, especially by American collectors of slave narratives in the antebellum period, there is a distinct possibility that Prince was also a pawn. However, Salih fails to address the fact that throughout the narrative, Prince offers several examples that she is neither weak nor compliant. Prince defends herself, refusing the sexual advances of Mr. D; protecting Mr. D's daughter from his physical abuse; and speaking up for herself to Mr. and Mrs. Wood. Given the strength of Prince's character related through personal references, it is difficult to accept Prince's passivity. Prince's personality suggests that she would want to be completely involved in the production of her autobiography—that she would not be silenced. If information was excised from her text, she may have been actively involved in its removal. While Salih suggests the possibility of Pringle's concern with libel, there is another possibility. Rather than being concerned with libel, Pringle may have been trying to present an honest, unbiased account told from the narrator's perspective. Pringle may have been more concerned with protecting Prince and providing an income for her than with using her to further the abolitionist movement.

Prince exhibits some agency in the process of her naming. Prince may have been given her father's name as a surname, but the name Prince is still one that connects the author to her biological father and not to the owner who named her at birth or to any of the other masters and mistresses who considered her their chattel. Historically, slaves in the US took the surnames of their owners. Isaac Adams, a former slave originally from Louisiana, states “[w]hen my pappy was born his parents belonged to a Mr. Adams, so he took Adams for his last name, and I did too, because I was his son” (Yetman 10). Other former slaves, like Andrew Boone, simply state, “I belonged to Billy Boone in slavery,” demonstrating the connection between slave and slave

owner surnames (Yetman 33). This practice was also common in the Caribbean—particularly in instances in which owners were also relatives. Pringle states that Prince was also known as Molly Wood, Wood being the surname of her last owners. Given her treatment at the hands of the Woods, Prince would not have wanted to retain their family name, and she does not.

In a written testimony given by a Mrs. Forsyth, who Prince worked for in the summer of 1829 before she was hired by Pringle and his wife, Prince is referred to as Mary James (Pringle “Supplement” 54). Although Prince has a husband, aside from this instance she exerts little effort to claim his surname as hers, which may demonstrate a considerable amount of independence, particularly for an early 19<sup>th</sup> century woman. Prince does not appear to want to take her husband’s name; if she wanted to be referred to as Mary James in her autobiography, it would seem easy for her to exercise that option. In addition, it would be more logical for Pringle to use Prince’s married name to give her some level of middle-class respectability by stressing her role as a married woman with a husband—a husband that Mr. and Mrs. Wood were physically keeping her separated from indefinitely. Also, a large element of the pre- and Victorian female persona and feminine ideal was the middle-class marriage replete with proper husband, home, and children. Using James as Prince’s last name and emphasising that she was married would have helped to offer Prince element of propriety. The name James and emphasising Prince’s role as a married lady would have also given Prince some commonality with her female, middle-class audience.

With the various names available, Pringle could have used either Wood or James as both were equally legitimate as her father’s slave name. Pringle writes, “we have retained Mary’s paternal name of Prince” but he does not specify who is meant by “we” (Pringle “Footnote” 29). It is unlikely that Susanna Strickland, who was a promising, but not yet successful, writer relying

on Pringle's connections in the publishing business to further her career, would have exercised much of an influence in this matter. Rauwerda believes that Strickland's transcription of the narrative was likely moulded by her desire to earn Pringle's favour by showing off her literary skills and emphasising the propagandistic aspects of the narrative important to Pringle's abolitionist cause (400). However, there is little concrete evidence to support Rauwerda's position that Strickland's transcription was intended to please Pringle. Overall, there is little evidence to support the position that Strickland altered the text at all. Strickland had no obvious motivations except increasing her chances of having a successful writing career. This goal could have been accomplished by simply transcribing Prince's narrative for Pringle.

In addition, Strickland admits in the introduction to her transcription of Ashton Warner's slave narrative that "until only a few months ago, [she was] one of the apathetical and deluded class," meaning planters and pro-slavery groups she was currently criticising for their behaviour towards slaves and their perspectives on slavery (6). A few months prior, she was transcribing Prince's narrative. Whereas Strickland actively participates in the production of Warner's narrative, penning both the "Advertisement" and "Introduction" as well as doing the transcription, Strickland appears to function only as Prince's amanuensis. Strickland states that "the arguments of some friends of emancipation," who she encountered, "were insufficient to remove [her] prejudices" (7). Thus, Strickland freely admits that she was once a defender of, or an apologist for, slavery (7) As such, she believed "that it would be an act of glaring injustice to the planters to deprive them of [their] property" (8). Also, Prince's autobiography was first published on January 25, 1831—months before Warner's, which was published on March 1, 1831. It is reasonable to assume that Strickland completed her transcription of Prince's narrative while residing in the Pringle home and that the dictation was taken some months before

publication—particularly as Pringle did include Prince’s character references in Antigua, which would have taken time to collect. Based on the possible timeframe and Strickland’s admission, it seems more likely that the “we” Pringle refers to is Pringle himself and Prince because, ultimately, both Prince and Pringle were personally invested in having the narrative publicised. Therefore, it is quite possible that Prince plays a significant role in determining how the world would refer to her as she is heavily involved in making this decision.

A quick review of Prince’s autobiography reveals that she has an aptitude for remembering names, not only those of her owners’ but of everyday people who came into her life. Therefore, it is difficult to understand why Prince would be silent about her name. Did she refer to herself as Molly, Mary, Moll, or with another name? Fryer contends that slaves’ “own African names, filled with meaning, were taken from them” once they became chattel (24). However, some slaves carried African names to maintain a connection to their culture and ancestors. Historian Trevor Burnard’s research on slave naming in colonial 18<sup>th</sup> century Jamaica reveals that recorded slave names were given to them by Whites (328). However, Burnard’s examination of the diaries of 18<sup>th</sup> -century Jamaican planters also shows that slaves chose names for themselves. Some of the names Burnard records are “Obraflommy, Cranke, and Naemina” in addition to “Oga, Owaria, Abuse, and Dowotronny (or Sawno)” (329). African slaves used these names among themselves, so they are rarely recorded in the plantation logs. Slaves’ African names were of such importance to them that Burnard postulates White renaming of slaves may have provided an effective way “to assume control over them, thereby announcing their mastery” (330). It is possible that Prince had an African name and was hesitant to make such a statement to Pringle or Strickland, who may have dismissed the practice as pagan, savage, or childish. The possibility also exists that Prince suppressed this name to keep some part of her

life private. In any case, the absence of Prince's true name, the name by which she self-identified, is unnerving because its absence takes away a large portion of her identity and raises the troubling question of whether she is speaking or being spoken about in her autobiography.

Mary Seacole's autobiography does not suffer from the same interruptions as Prince's. As a literate woman, Seacole could physically write her travelogue, making an amanuensis like Strickland unnecessary and negating any possibility of the intensive editing that could occur in the transcription from an oral to a written text. Writing her own manuscript gave Seacole more authority and agency over her work. Seacole was a free woman; there were no abolitionist societies to please and no current owner, or past owners, to avoid offending. The timing of the narrative may be relevant regarding the end of the Crimean War as well as the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834; Seacole's autobiography was not released until 1857. This 23-year gap, given abolition and the end of the apprenticeship period, could have helped to curb the general social opinion and cultural perceptions of Caribbean Blacks in the UK during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Britons, especially those in metropolitan and/or shipping centres such as London and Cardiff may have become more tolerant of people of colour in general because as port cities, their merchants and residents encountered Blacks as sailors or passengers more than their inland urban counterparts. Some records indicate that England was then viewed as a racially-tolerant society.

Literary theorist Evelyn J. Hawthorne notes that "England during this period basked in a reputation of racial tolerance and fairness" (319). Former African American slave Harriet Ann Jacobs recounts the time she spent as a nanny in England in her autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Jacobs states that during the ten months she was in England, she "never saw the slightest symptom of prejudice against color" (928). Jacobs admits that she

“entirely forgot it, till the time came...to return to America” (928). Fourth, and maybe most significant, Mary Seacole was considered a war heroine because she chose to deploy and volunteer as a nurse at the front during the Crimean War. Seacole’s stated her motives were her strong sense of patriotism and to help the soldiers, many of whom she had known before the war when they were stationed in Jamaica where she ran a hotel.

Seacole’s claims about her role in the Crimean War are supported by others who spoke in her favour and in praise of her dedication to the troops. In Chapter XIII titled “My Work in the Crimea,” Seacole provides several testimonials from soldiers stating that she cured them of illnesses such as dysentery, diarrhoea, inflammation of the chest, and jaundice (113-115). While Seacole gives many accounts of being near the battlefield, there are no testimonials from soldiers who survived the battles in her *Wonderful Adventures*. However, W. H. Russell, *The Times* special correspondent, not only writes the opening notes to the text but also states that he “witnessed her devotion and courage” (5). There is a strong likelihood that he witnessed her pulling wounded soldiers off the battlefield as she claims to have done, which is an act of bravery and enough to classify Seacole as a war heroine. In addition to risking her life, Seacole eventually lost her fortune in her service to the British military in the Crimea. Seacole should not be accused of having pecuniary interests in initially traveling to the Crimea as she did make several attempts to volunteer as a nurse with the War Office and with Florence Nightingale’s nurses. However, Seacole is repeatedly rebuffed, and often openly ridiculed, when she tries to offer her services. She notes that while in Jamaica people are aware of the usefulness of “a motherly yellow woman,” in England she is not surprised “that they should laugh, good-naturedly enough” at her offer (Seacole 72). At one point, Seacole describes camping out at the War Office engaging in “ridiculous endeavours to gain an interview with the Secretary-at-War,”

which ultimately failed (72). While Seacole has been accused of attempting to profit from the war, she did tend the wounded on the battlefield at great physical risk and without any expectation of receiving either accolades or remuneration. Seacole went to the front to “nurse her ‘sons’ there”; making a profit only became necessary when she was rejected as a volunteer (72). The outcome of those rejections was that the “motherly yellow woman” became Mother Seacole: The Crimean War Heroine.

Despite the obvious benefits of Seacole’s privileged position as a free woman who is also literate, like Prince there are also curious absences. Seacole omits names from her narrative. She never gives her name before marrying Edwin Seacole. Never in her autobiography does Seacole state her birth name, Mary Jane Grant. The names of her parents are also curiously absent, although Seacole discusses them in general terms. While Seacole references her half-brother repeatedly, tactfully omitting his name, her younger sister Louisa Grant is only mentioned in passing with no reference to her name. Perhaps the most significant absence is that of her daughter, Sarah or Sally, who Seacole avoids completely but makes an appearance in another Crimean War text. Sally’s absence is discussed in detail later in this chapter. As with Prince, these silences raise the question of what information Seacole was trying to conceal and why.

Perhaps the absence of self-naming is a 19<sup>th</sup> century literary convention used by female writers to create a clear delineation between the private (feminine) and public (masculine). However, it may not be as Seacole does mention herself by name in other ways. For example, Seacole informs her audience throughout the narrative that many people she nursed both in the Caribbean and the Crimea call her “Aunty” or “Mother” Seacole. The use of “aunty” by a White male to describe a woman of colour has a very negative connotation as this is the how older, female slaves were addressed by Whites and this habit continued well into the post-emancipation

period in the US. However, the use of a more personal moniker such as “mother” gives Seacole an air of domesticity, n drawing her audience back to the feminine sphere of the home, which is one possible reason for Seacole to take every opportunity to use these sobriquets.

Literary theorist Nicole Fluhr believes that Seacole’s use of these specifically-domestic terms when describing herself serve larger purposes than just reasserting her femininity. Fluhr states,

[s]tyling herself the ‘Mother’ of the British troops, Seacole coded her entrepreneurial ventures and medical work in the Crimea as maternal labor, positioning the soldiers who were her customers and patients as figurative children (96).

The Victorian ideal of a middle-class English woman was not to engage in physical labour outside of the home; instead, the focus was on domestic pursuits. A Victorian woman from the middle class could perform domestic work for and within her family, preferably the immediate family. In the Caribbean, women of colour were expected to work. For example, Seacole describes her mother as “an admirable doctress,” which later became Seacole’s chosen career (12). Seacole even states that “but for being frequently with [her] mother, [she] might very likely have grown up idle and useless” (12). In addition, Seacole’s mother “kept a boarding-house in Kingston” (Seacole 11). Anthony Trollope, a 19<sup>th</sup> century British author who visited the Caribbean, stated there “is a mystery about hotels in the British West Indies” as these establishments were “always kept by fat, middle-aged coloured ladies who have no husbands” (205-206). Shepherd’s research confirms that in urban locations pre-emancipation, “[s]ome free coloured women earned money from running small hotels or lodging houses” (Shepherd 74). Sociologist Pedro L. V. Welch and historian Richard A. Goodridge’s research on free women of colour in pre-emancipation Barbados provides some explanations for this trend, noting that most

Caribbean colonial towns and cities were distinctly oriented towards maritime activities (56). A strong shipping and trade industry brought a steady flow of visitors into the region's urban centres, making rooming houses a necessity and, by extension, viable businesses. Welch and Goodridge note that the "demand for services, created business activities in several areas" of which lodging was one (56). Lodging houses became the business milieu of freed Black women because of a shortage of Whites and perhaps the unwillingness of local Whites to enter the service industries. Shepherd also notes that these lodging-houses "operated as convalescent homes for white men and women" and that the "owners were noted for their skill in herbal medicines and were said to be excellent nurses" (75). Seacole, her mother before her, and later her sister Louisa Grant all functioned in this capacity in Kingston.

Within the Caribbean context of the post-emancipation period, working remained completely acceptable for any woman of colour. After all, it was not unusual for female slaves to work as hard as the males; Prince recounts the story of Hetty, the French slave who was kind to her as a child. She describes Hetty's work overload, which passed to her after she was beaten to death by Captain I. Although Seacole is a free woman, she must account for her un-feminine actions, not only as a "doctress" but as a business woman—particularly one working at the front as a sutler (seller), which has a negative connotation tied to the opportunistic nature of the work. Historically, sutlers attached themselves to armies, following and selling any items the soldiers required. Seacole became a sutler in the Crimea out of necessity, but she must please the audience that will ultimately buy her book and who may not be familiar with the practice of middle-class Caribbean women working or with the necessity of sutlers to an army. Seacole's redesign of the Victorian female identity and role merged "apparently incompatible maternal ideals, juxtaposing English and Jamaican, middle- and working-class, and black, mixed-race, and

white mothering practices” (Fluhr 97). The merging of these different forms of being female was a necessity for Seacole to reach her income goal. Seacole’s inclusion of these facts, combined with the tone of her narrative, gives her text an authenticity that may not be as present in Prince’s autobiography.

One of the issues with accepting the authenticity of Mary Prince’s autobiography is the voice of the text. To a 21<sup>st</sup> century reader, the issues with voice and authenticity in Prince’s autobiography rest in the improbability of a Caribbean slave with only the most cursory education communicating with familiarity in the standard, academic English of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as Prince does. A perusal of slave narratives from the US collected during the 1930s by the Work Projects Administration (WPA) reveal a version of American English that is both rooted in Southern American dialogic patterns but could also be considered ‘broken’ by linguists because of the lack of adherence to usage conventions. For example, Victoria Adams from South Carolina stated, “I was borned a slave, nigh on to ninety years ago, right down here at Cedar Creek, in Fairfield County” (10). In his interview, Will Adams from Texas stated,

My folks allus belongs to the Cavins and wore their name till after ‘mancipation. Pa and ma was named Freeman and Amelia Cavin and Massa Dave fotches them to Texas from Alabama, along with ma’s mother, what we called Maria (1).

The versions of English acquired by these former slaves suggests that their language was collected over time and functional rather than grammatically correct.

The significance of these extracts from slave narratives in the Southern US is that none of the former slaves used standard, academic American English. Some of the interviewees used cognates perhaps as they acquired or heard them. The transcriber’s note from the Texas narratives collection mentions, “Clear spelling mistakes have been corrected however,

inconsistent language usage (such as ‘day’ and ‘dey’) has been maintained” (i). Some transcribers made a concerted effort to retain English language usage typical of slave societies in the American South, which, in turn, adds to the authenticity of each narrative.

While the goal of this research is neither to engage in performing a detailed comparison nor a contrast between slavery in the US and the Caribbean, it is important to mention that very few slaves received even the most rudimentary education and those who were lucky received a more formal education consisting of the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic. This occurred in both the US and the Caribbean. In the *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass* (1845), Fredrick Douglass (1818-1895) describes giving his food to poor White boys in exchange for them teaching him and helping him to further his education (44). Douglass was a rarity because those White boys taught him instead of reporting him to his master. Harriet Jacobs was taught to read and write by her mistress, Margaret Horniblow (Andrews and Gates 1012). Later, her owner Dr. Norcom used her ability to read against her by passing her sexually explicit notes. In comparison, Prince’s diction, pronunciation, and terminology are flawless; for example, she stated, “When I was an infant, old Mr. Myners died, and there was a division of the slaves and other property among the family” (6). Educated slaves, like Douglass and Jacobs, were considered dangerous because it was plausible that education would lead to questioning the institution of slavery, demanding freedom, and escaping, which is exactly what they did. These possibilities provide another reason why slave owners in both regions did not educate their slaves.

Although Prince’s diction is considerably more formal than those collected by the WPA, it is difficult to believe that Caribbean slaves received any more education than their American counterparts. Spry Rush’s research demonstrates that they did not. Without some formal

education, it is unlikely that Caribbean slaves would have been abler to communicate using standard, academic English than American slaves. In addition, Prince's life as a slave after her first mistress died was one of physical and mental privations without the luxury of even the most cursory education. Prince acknowledges learning to read as an adult from some ladies at the Moravian church, but she was an adult, possibly in her thirties at the time. Her classes were informal and geared towards the Afro-Caribbean adult students learning to spell and read so that, presumably, they could read the Christian Bible (Prince 29). While Prince mentioned that she "got on very fast" in this class, she makes no other mention in her autobiography of her own education or of learning to write (29). With these considerations in mind, it is difficult to understand how Prince could have dictated her narrative in such a formal tone and with the use of standard diction.

Some theorists postulate that Thomas Pringle and Susanna Strickland exerted considerable influence on the language of Prince's autobiography, meaning that nuances of Prince's 19<sup>th</sup> century, Caribbean slave diction were altered. Literary theorist Sandra Pouchet Paquet claims that "Prince's original language is partially lost in translation from an oral to a written text" (131). Pouchet Paquet is conservative in her assessment as Prince's voice seems to be completely re-inscribed in the standard, academic English of the time. In addition, Pringle constantly interrupts the flow of Prince's autobiography with a series of notes to enhance the text. Also, there is the possibility that Strickland was probably more of a heavy-handed interviewer than a transcriber. However, there is another possibility. It is also quite likely that Prince, understanding that she would not be taken seriously by her middle-class British audience if she did not connect with them on a basic, linguistic level, requested that Pringle and/or Strickland align her actual words with the conventions of standard, written 19<sup>th</sup> century English.

If this sequence of events did occur, Prince is employing pastiche—imitating a language that is not her own—but she does this to reach her audience. Gates notes that pastiche can suggest “futility in the face of a seemingly indomitable mode of representation” (*Signifying* loc. 409). Standard, academic English is the indomitable mode of communication that Prince must overcome to reach her audience. This explanation would seem plausible as Prince is not ‘speaking’ using a language common among Caribbean slaves or any slaves with limited access to education for that matter. Prince’s text is constructed using the standard, academic English of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and this task is accomplished with Pringle’s, and perhaps Strickland’s help.

Pouchet Paquet, citing James Olney, observes that “Prince is no ‘neutral passive recorder but rather a creative active shaper’” of her life story (131). Stover, in an examination of Jacobs’ slave narrative, notes that Jacobs, like other Black women writing autobiographies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, subverted “existing literary genres” to connect with their possible audiences and “to enlist the sympathies and support” of those audiences (“Nineteenth-Century”134). The likelihood of Prince having similar goals is logical. Both Prince and Jacobs, writing as formerly-enslaved women, needed to reach White audiences—Prince in England and Jacobs in the US—because these people had the power to change the lives of the enslaved. If Prince’s voice had not been ‘cleaned up and polished’, English audiences might have ridiculed her, by extension the events of her life, and ignored the serious social issue she was attempting to expose.

Prince’s autobiography was not solely about her life or her predicament. Admittedly, Prince shared her story to gain her freedom; she needed to generate an income to survive and purchase her freedom, but she also wanted to return to her husband in Antigua as a free woman independent of the Woods and their control. Despite these pressures, Prince is also concerned

with the slaves who were not as lucky as she was to find herself free and in England. She states, “In telling my own sorrows, I cannot pass by those of my fellow-slaves—for when I think of my own griefs, I remember theirs” (Prince 22). Prince observes, “what my eyes have seen I think it is my duty to relate; for few people in England know what slavery is” (21). The fact that Prince makes a point of mentioning other slaves like her mother, Hetty, her baby sister Rebecca, and Sarah, demonstrates agency as she is actively directing her English audience to consider the plight of the hundreds of thousands of people just like her still held in bondage.

By speaking the language of her oppressors, Prince connects with them, humanises herself and other slaves, and draws the audience’s attention to the issue at hand. She presents the female slave’s perspective of a system that benefits mostly Europeans. Prince is not necessarily reaching out to abolitionists as that would be a case of ‘preaching to the choir’. Instead, she is addressing the thousands of English people who are either not concerned with the issue of Caribbean slavery or not convinced that abolition is a viable solution to this issue. To convince them, she had to speak their language but in a manner that gave her agency. It seems that Pringle and possibly Strickland helped Prince to do just that by aggressively editing the language of her narrative. In this way, Prince is posing a challenge by co-opting the language of her oppressors to fully convey the depth and gravity of female slave life in the Caribbean.

When an institution such as slavery is placed in plain, simple terms, it becomes more real and its daily acts of inhumanity more believable. It was necessary to bring the reality of chattel slavery and the social ramifications of the plantation system into sharper focus, particularly in Great Britain where geography separated the people who financially benefitted from Caribbean slavery from the day-to-day functions of their plantations. Plantation owners were often far removed for most of the year from their property in the Caribbean, spending most of the year in

Britain. English merchants and consumers might never visit the Caribbean and witness slavery first hand, or they might receive accounts of slavery that were contrary to the actual events. From Prince's perspective, those absentee plantation owners and merchants needed to understand exactly what occurred on the plantations to earn their money. While Prince is trying to connect with these men, possibly through their wives who are more likely to read her narrative, she is challenging them. As mentioned before, Prince makes a point of telling the stories of other slaves for the sole purpose of making her audience understand that her experiences were not isolated. Prince also wanted Mr. and Mrs. Wood to agree to sell her so she could freely return to Antigua and to her husband. Also, Pringle knew that Prince needed an income that was not reliant on physical labour as Prince was disabled by her enslavement. Pringle mentions in his "Supplement" to Prince's *History* that Prince is not "capable of much hard work, (for her constitution appears to be a good deal broken)" (55).

Seacole's situation seems no less dire than Prince's as she faced destitution in England when she returned from the Crimea. In England during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this could mean being sent to a workhouse, which often happened to people in debt who could not afford to pay their bills. After the Crimean War ended and the British troops began decamping, Seacole and her business partner Thomas Day were forced to take whatever payment was offered for supplies that they originally paid considerably more to obtain for the soldiers. This left Seacole with only one option: that of returning to England as a pauper, which is exactly what she did. Unlike Prince who arrived in England friendless, homeless, and destitute, Seacole had the benefit of powerful friends who remembered her from Jamaica and witnessed her service to the British military in the Crimea. However, this did not mean that Seacole was in a better financial situation than Prince. She needed an income, and it seems logical that at her age at the time the Crimean War

ended, which would have been 51, she may not have been as capable of performing intense physical labour as she had before. However, this seems unlikely as Seacole wanted to follow the British troops to India (Salih “Appendix II” 177). What seems more likely than physical disability is that Seacole’s admirers felt some level of responsibility for Mother Seacole. She helped the nation care for its soldiers in wartime, and the time came for the nation to show its gratitude. Another possibility is that Seacole may not have wanted to perform any tasks that were too physically-taxing or strenuous. Seacole needed to generate an income and a passive income, such as a book royalty, was preferable to manual labour or the workhouse. Literary theorist Lorraine Mercer observes, “Seacole made enough money from the profits to live well after returning from the Crimea virtually bankrupt” (1). Seacole is not particularly silent about many of her experiences—particularly those situations in which she faces discrimination. Thus, Seacole’s travelogue about a Caribbean woman’s adventures serves the additional purpose of offering her the opportunity to respond, expressing her annoyance and frustrations with racist social systems.

In addition to Seacole’s literary attempts at describing and challenging discrimination, between the lines of her autobiography there may be some attempt at discrediting *The Lady with the Lamp*, Florence Nightingale. It seems unlikely that if Nightingale knew of Seacole, she would not enlist her aid as a volunteer nurse—particularly when many of the illnesses the British soldiers suffered from in the Crimea were the same complaints that Seacole nursed soldiers and civilians through in Jamaica. However, Seacole was turned away by Nightingale’s staff. There was a logical explanation for Seacole’s rejection, and it rested with Nightingale. In a letter to her brother-in-law Sir Henry Verney, Nightingale admits that she “had the greatest difficulty in repelling Mrs Seacole’s advances” (Salih “Appendix III” 180). Throughout this addendum to the

letter, which is labelled “burn” and is on a separate page from the rest of the missive, Nightingale makes repeated references to Seacole providing the soldiers with alcohol and getting them drunk. While Nightingale freely admits that Seacole was very kind, she also accuses Seacole of running a “bad house” in the Crimea (Salih “Appendix III” 180). In Seacole’s narrative, there is an element of wanting to take some revenge on Nightingale and her supporters, who became Seacole’s detractors. Seacole would have been accepted as an official Crimean nurse if Nightingale enlisted her into the volunteer nursing corps. When Seacole was turned away by every volunteer organisation, she accurately assumes that her consistent rejections are racially-motivated. Seacole states, after a final interview with one of Nightingale’s companions, “I read in her face the fact that, had there been a vacancy, I should not have been chosen to fill it” (73). Brought to tears, Seacole asks “Did these ladies shrink from accepting my aid because my blood flowed beneath a somewhat duskier skin than theirs?” (73-74). Based on the repeated humiliations Seacole endured at the hands of Nightingale’s and the War Office’s “flunkeys,” she might want a bit of comeuppance—writing about the people who completely rejected her. In addition, had she been allowed to volunteer, she would have never lost her savings because they would not have been risked in the Spring Hill British Hotel venture with Thomas Day. A bit of revenge is certainly a valid reason for writing a text—particularly for Seacole who was rebuffed because she was Black.

Self-editing manifests itself in several ways in the autobiographies of Prince and Seacole, but the form that is of most interest is the absences. There is a lot left unsaid in both Prince and Seacole’s autobiographies, leaving their audiences wondering what is missing and why that information was omitted. In Prince’s slave narrative, the most troubling absence surrounds the sexual abuses that she may have experienced as a slave. While Prince delicately hints at the

possibility of these assaults, she never addresses them completely or directly. Seacole's silence is also about a personal matter that many Victorian middle-class female writers might not omit. Specifically, Seacole never mentions her adopted or biological daughter Sarah or Sally, who is physically present with Seacole in the Crimea. Sally is only discussed by others who saw her in the Crimea, most notably by French chef Alexis Soyer (1810-1858). In *A Culinary Campaign: Being Historical Reminiscences of the Late War* (1856), Soyer mentions Sally in chapters 22 and 34. He refers to her as the "Egyptian Beauty" with "blue eyes and black hair" (Soyer 435). When leaving Spring Hill for the last time, Soyer offers this assessment of Sally: "I then parted, quite pleased with Sally's modesty. Sally richly deserves the title of the Dark, instead of Fair, Maid of the Eastern War" (436). Soyer admires Sally's modesty and appreciates of her physical beauty, but he acknowledges that she is Black. He is clearly complimentary of Sally, and she must have been a source of pride for her mother, but Seacole refrains from mentioning her raising the question of why.

In both texts, the absences and resulting silences involve sexual matters—Prince with sexual abuse most likely beginning in her childhood and Seacole with the existence of a daughter. Perhaps the perceptions of pre- and Victorian women as pure or angelic, motherly but not sexual may have contributed to Prince's and Seacole's silence on sexual topics. The perception of Victorian women and sexuality can be summarized by this excerpt from historian Nathan G. Hale's *Freud and the Americans* (1971), "Sexual repression, modesty, and innocence were associated with middle- and upper-class women. These traits were the sexual equivalents of social gentility and refinement" (41). This view of Victorian women of certain social classes has been passed down to contemporary times as though it was part and parcel of their personalities and casts intercourse during this period as secretive and only for reproduction. Such a view of

the Victorians as sexually repressed is simply not logical; they were, after all, human and sexual intercourse was probably motivated by as many factors as it is today. Perhaps the retrospective view taken on Victorian sexual repression is not actually excessive control but an attempt to sever the public from the private.

Sociologist Steven Steidman takes a different view of Victorian sexuality. Steidman notes, “Victorians originated the modern idea of sexual instinct that is natural, omnipresent and powerful,” but Victorians preserved “the spiritual essence of marriage” by de-sensualizing sex and erecting “elaborate barriers to contain erotic desires” (49). These barriers were built because “[s]ensuality was thought to be governed by an internal logic whose dynamic force is lust and whose outcome is personal ruin” (Steidman 50). Steidman contributes to an image of the Victorians as sexually repressed and leery of giving in to ‘excessive’ sexual pleasure. Perhaps because the Victorians were less vocal about sex and sexuality, it is easier in this contemporary era of sexual candidness to assume that they were overly inhibited. Silence could be a manifestation of repression, but it could also demonstrate a keen sense of privacy.

Sexual abuse was a common occurrence on plantations and, for women and girls who endured the Middle Passage, began on the ships that brought them to the Americas. Captured African and former slave Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797) wrote of European sailors, “I have even known them gratify their brutal passion with females not ten years old...As if it were no crime in the whites to rob an innocent African girl of her virtue” (74). Equiano’s observation raises the question of how much slave children knew about sex and sexuality. Historians Anthony S. Parent, Jr. and Susan Brown Wallace compiled some slave narratives from former slave children in the US, noting that, for the most part, slave children were not completely aware of sex or sexuality. They, like their White counterparts, “knew very little” because “their parents felt they

did not need to know much about sexual matters” (Parent and Wallace 368 and 369). Slave boys were not allowed to “court” until the age of 17 and girls not until age 21 (Parent and Wallace 372). Parent and Wallace also note that slave children were humiliated by “owners’ deliberate disallowance of underwear”; slave children entered puberty without underclothes, causing considerable shame (384). Thus, slave children progressed into sexual maturity without proper clothing but with enough self-awareness to feel embarrassed. Parent and Wallace also note that once slave girls became “aware of their sexual vulnerability,” they “developed a sense of modesty, covering up their bodies” (385). Harriet Jacobs describes similar knowledge of sex in the home of Dr. Norcom. Although enslaved in the Caribbean, this is likely a similar environment to the one in which Mary Prince lived.

Scholars have observed Prince’s silence about sexual matters (Baumgartner 11; Pouchet Paquet 131). Whereas Prince’s African American contemporary Harriet Jacobs is more vocal, as well as veering between *apologia* and defiance about her sexual experiences, Prince skirts around the topic, giving enough information to create an image but not enough to be offensive. The only marginal reference that Prince makes to sexual matters directly involving her is to Mr. D, who “had an ugly fashion of stripping himself quite naked, and ordering [her] then to wash him in a tub of water” (21). She also mentions that when he called her to come and wash him, she would often not come, resulting in beatings. Prior to these events, Prince briefly discusses being on Turk’s Island where she states “the Buckra men there were very wicked” and she “saw and heard much that was very very bad at that place” (20). The use of the term “wicked” could simply reflect contemporaneous language, or it could connote behaviour that is sexually explicit in nature. However, in Prince’s silences she does give some evidence of abuse that takes on a sexually sadistic tone. For example, when Prince is sold to Captain and Mrs. I as a child of 12,

both master and mistress punish her by stripping her naked, hanging her up by her wrists, and whipping her. Prince states that “[t]o strip [her] naked—to hang [her] up by the wrists and lay [her] flesh open with the cow-skin, was an ordinary punishment for even a slight offense” (15). In these scenes, sex and torment are inextricably linked in an act intended to give Captain and Mrs. I the most pleasure as the Black, female form is nude, on display, and subjected to physical violence.

Scenes of sexualised physical violence have become commonplace in contemporary fiction set in the antebellum south. For example, in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), when slave Sethe is captured after an escape attempt, she endures the shame of being held down while two White men suckle her lactating breasts. Sethe, who is 8-months pregnant, already a mother, and married, is both horrified and traumatised by this ultimate act of violation and humiliation. Michelle Cliff’s biographical novel, *Free Enterprise* (1994) also provides a graphic description of the fusion of sex and violence. When Annie Christmas, a mixed-race Jamaican follower of John Brown, is captured, she is put on a chain gang where her gender is discovered when she menstruates. Soon after the discovery, Annie is put on public display and is essentially raped by a series of Black men who are as victimised as she. Annie is publicly sexually abused for the pleasure of a White, male audience, standing nearby and leering. These fictional public displays of the sexual abuse of Black females mirror Prince’s account of being hung up naked and whipped as a White audience takes pleasure in the victim’s pain. While it would be easy to label these acts examples of sadism, the answer is not so clear-cut. White men brutalised Black female bodies because they could and because, at the time the events occurred, it was socially acceptable in Westernised societies to sexualise and brutalise Black girls and women.

While it is interesting that Prince would mention these abuses but not overt sexual abuse, her silence about sexual matters is not entirely unexpected. For the first 12 years of her life, Prince lived in an intact family with a mother and a father. Although her father lived on another plantation, she knew him and he seemed to be a consistent presence in her life as she ran to him when trying to escape from Richard Darrel, her owner after Captain and Mrs. I. Parent and Wallace's research reveals that slave children, particularly those living in intact families, did not have an awareness of sexual matters. In addition, 19<sup>th</sup> century women did not discuss sex, sexuality, or sexual matters as much or openly. There was a sense of modesty among pre- and Victorians in general regarding their bodies and sexual matters that does not necessarily indicate prudery; there were other factors to be considered. For example, Pouchet Paquet writes that the possibility of "legal liabilities" attached to publishing "sexually explicit material in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain" and "[s]ocial and religious prohibitions" may also have been major factors in contributing to Prince's silence about sexual subjects (131). While Pouchet Paquet raises valid points, there are more personal issues to consider—that of Prince's need for privacy and her dignity. Although Prince is not entirely open about sexual topics, her candid accounts of her childhood sexualised torture as well as her references to the "wicked Buckra men" of Turk's Island and Mr. D's inappropriate behaviour may be Prince's way of addressing the sexual abuses that female slaves endured while also maintaining her dignity. Prince controls the content of her autobiography—particularly the descriptions of female slave sexual abuse—thereby retaining her privacy and removing the side-show element to the sexual abuse of female slaves.

Seacole is also silent about subjects that are remotely sexual. It seems odd at first glance that she does not mention her daughter Sarah/Sally, which is part of the Victorian female familial and socially-prescribed role was motherhood. It seems more logical to mention her daughter to

reaffirm her role as a mother. There are different ways of interpreting the absence of Seacole's daughter from her autobiography. From a feminist perspective, it is not necessary for Seacole to mention her daughter because the text is Seacole's narrative—her life story told in her way. The constant emphasis on women's roles as wives and mothers could be interpreted as distractions from their lives and experiences as individuals. Another interpretation may involve Seacole's reasons for being in the Crimea: she is a woman who goes unaccompanied to a war zone. Given the historical period of the narrative, Seacole could not admit that her daughter was with her in a war zone, unmarried, young, beautiful, and around soldiers. Her actions, which are contradictions to typical Victorian female behaviour, dictate that "Seacole...dress everything in traditional feminine attire to be acceptable to her public" (Mercer 11). To feminise her actions and make them acceptable to her audience, Seacole refers to herself as "Mother Seacole" (77), the "motherly yellow woman" who goes to the Crimea to "nurse her 'sons'" (72). If Seacole is the mother of the troops, she cannot be a mother to another child. Her focus as a mother must be directed solely at the troops—the 'boys' who need her. There is also the question of Sally's paternity. Soyer confirms that Sally was a teenager during the Crimean War. Seacole's husband died in October 1844, so it is possible that if Sally was Seacole's biological daughter, she was also Edwin Seacole's daughter. There could have been a literary motive for removing Sally. It is possible that editing Sally out of Seacole's story was just a natural progression in Victorian writing—more specifically, the severing of the public and private spheres in women's autobiographical writing. Seacole makes few statements about her family; her mother, father, brother, sister, and husband are mentioned briefly. These silences seem like the efforts of a woman keeping her private life out of the public eye. Seacole seems to be actively choosing not to reveal the existence of her daughter. This wilful silence challenges the idea that Seacole, as a

symbol of Victorian womanhood, should disclose her role as a biological mother to appear more socially acceptable to her audience.

In the pre-Victorian and Victorian periods, especially among the middle class, sex and sexuality were not public topics—particularly not regarding ladies<sup>14</sup>. As this is Prince’s and Seacole’s audience, the absences regarding sexual matters are likely necessary. Also, women of African descent were viewed as promiscuous. Only 20 years before Prince’s autobiography and 40 years before Seacole’s autobiography, Sara Baartman was exhibited half-naked throughout Napoleonic France as the Hottentot Venus. Caribbean literary theorist H. Adlai Murdoch notes that 19<sup>th</sup> century metropolitan literature was rife with stereotypical depictions of people from tropical regions, portraying them as hot-blooded (260). Overtly sexualized depictions of African women in art and literature were some of the unspoken hurdles that Prince and Seacole were attempting to overcome in their autobiographies. As women of African descent, their avoidance of even remotely sexual topics discredited the belief among European and American Whites that Black women were prone to immorality, lasciviousness, and sexual depravity. Their silences about sex also challenges the 19<sup>th</sup> century belief that Black women had little pride or respectability.

Prince and Seacole’s autobiographies have a distinct pattern of discourse reflecting not only their identities but their frustrations, Prince with her slave status and Seacole with the limitations placed on her as an Afro-Jamaican. The tone of these texts is conversational, but, between the lines of these ‘friendly’ conversations, Prince and Seacole give backchat. The expectation is that their autobiographies will reach an English female audience; Prince makes repeated references to the English people in her slave narrative and Seacole’s travelogue is aimed

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<sup>14</sup> Here, ‘ladies’ is used to emphasise the social view of Victorian women. They were *supposed* to be ladylike with the behaviours and attitudes that the term “lady” implies.

at evoking English pride in the Crimean War Heroine. Prince and Seacole hope that these women, the wives, mothers, and daughters of powerful men, can exert some influence that will alter the situations that the writers describe despite scepticism about the veracity of the narratives. This is particularly true of Prince's narrative, which is also a form of unburdening.

The autobiography is the only literary genre that allows authors to give a full, historical account of their life experiences, particularly those that are painful and remain unresolved. Therefore, autobiographical writing can be therapeutic for the writer. Literary theorist Hilde Staels's research discusses psychoanalysis as a "talking cure" (54). Citing French feminist philosopher Julia Kristeva, Staels states that the talking cure involves individuals sharing their stories with each other (55). In personal narratives, the author can purge painful memories and heal through complete disclosure. Prince's talking cure involves sharing her experiences with an audience. At the same time, Prince is probably keenly aware of the fact that her audience may be sceptical; therefore, she must use effective methods to convince them that her narrative is factual. One method is an emotional appeal.

The discourse pattern of Prince's narrative takes the form of sentimental, heartfelt unburdening; Prince confides in her audience and wills them to empathise with her. Literary theorist Lisa Lowe writes that "sentimental literature" is useful in gaining audience sympathy, emphasising the humanity of slaves and building a moral argument against the institution of chattel slavery (104). Prince, like Equiano, Douglass, and Jacobs, used the sentimentality of an emotional appeal to give "voice and consciousness" to her experiences as an Antigua slave (Lowe 104). Prince writes, "I will say the truth to English people who may read this history," reminding her English audience that although they may be unwilling to believe her, she is telling the truth (32). Prince informs her audience that they, as English people, are different from the

West Indian planters—these men, who “go out into the West Indies and act in such a beastly manner...forget God and all feeling of shame” (37). Literary theorist Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo writes that Prince “cunningly utilizes the tension between the English in England and the white West Indian creoles—‘the foreign people’” (188). By distinguishing between ‘good’ English people in England and ‘beastly’ English people in the West Indies, Prince drives an ideological wedge between her English audience and West Indian planters while also adding to her credibility as a first-hand witness to the atrocities enacted against slaves by their owners.

By describing her life in such ordinary terms, Prince is challenging the belief that slave women are marginally human, sexually permissive, and childish. She successfully connected with her audience to point out the immoral and unethical behaviour attached to slavery and the plantation system. Prince’s autobiography begins in the same way as others, with her birth, family, and geographic origins. The fact that she is born into slavery is stated matter-of-factly rather than as an unusual circumstance. Prince’s autobiography does not become less like the personal narratives of her free counterparts until she describes being sold as an infant with her mother or being ‘affectionately’ called “her little nigger” by Miss Betsey (6). Despite these differences in the slave versus the non-slave autobiography, Prince’s heartfelt confessional tone reached some people, and she was not entirely dismissed.

Seacole’s autobiography takes on a different tone from Prince’s because she was in an entirely different historical and social position. The most relevant historical difference between Prince’s and Seacole’s autobiography is timing. Slavery was abolished in the British Caribbean in 1834; Prince’s slave narrative predates abolition by three years whereas Seacole’s travelogue was published 23 years after abolition. The times had changed and the audience, while still middle class, was no longer being presented with a moral argument against an immoral

institution. The issue of social position is also relevant. African slaves occupied the lowest rung of the Caribbean social system whereas free Blacks were higher pre-emancipation. Seacole is neither a slave nor the immediate descendant of one; therefore, she is not operating under prejudices equitable to the discrimination Prince faced. Another difference is purpose; Seacole's autobiography is more entertainment than talking cure. The purpose of Seacole's narrative is to entertain and provided her with a steady income, so some details are more amusing than cathartic. For example, Seacole arrives in Gatun on the Isthmus of Panama in a light blue dress and white bonnet only to become covered with mud, is amusing (Seacole 20). Even Seacole views her attention to her appearance and the colours that she chooses with humour. When waiting in Balacava for transport to the front, Seacole helps the doctors with patients on the wharf while wearing a yellow dress and a blue bonnet with red ribbons. She contrasts the amusement her appearance causes with the harsh reality of death surrounding her. Seacole notices a surgeon coming toward her who she believes "would have laughed very merrily had it not been for the poor fellow at [her] feet" (88). When Sally claims that Soyer is teasing her, Seacole replies "a little innocent mirth now and then does one good. For my part, my son, I could not live without laughing" (Soyer 435). There is an underlying theme of humour in Seacole's travelogue that could never be expressed in Prince's slave narrative because of the purpose and tone of the stories they tell.

There is also the issue of authenticity based on whether a text has been zealously edited by a third party. With Seacole's travelogue, the probability of third-party editing is unlikely; Seacole wrote her text without intervention. She has pecuniary interests in mind, but Seacole is a war heroine. She was already satirised in Punch comics and mentioned in the English newspapers before the publication of her narrative. In addition, Seacole was a remarkably well-

travelled woman for the time; few women—particularly not Caribbean women of colour—strayed so far from home. Her international experiences make Seacole’s tone confident. In addition, her confidence is buoyed by her close familiarity with her topics, especially being an Afro-Caribbean woman in Victorian England. Poet Opal Palmer Adisa, who also writes of her personal experiences, states “As an African woman from the Caribbean, and a former colonial subject, I was not to know anything” (55). While Seacole seems blissfully unaware that she will face discrimination, Palmer Adisa has a keen understanding of how she is viewed as Black, woman, and Caribbean. Palmer Adisa is aware that she is “not even seen as an individual, but viewed as a mass of Black bother to be contained or put to work” (55).

Historically, Palmer Adisa’s observation is made approximately 140 years after the publication of Seacole’s *Wonderful Adventures*. To a contemporary audience examining Seacole’s frustrations, they seem almost absurd given the time, place, and Seacole’s position as an Afro-Caribbean woman. Cultural and literary theorist Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert would agree; in fact, Paravisini-Gebert contends that scenes in *Wonderful Adventures* in which Seacole seems distressed by the racial status quo are carefully crafted textual manipulations aimed at Seacole carving “a space for herself in English history and literature through her actions in the Crimea” (72). For example, when Seacole is rejected by the managers of the Crimean Fund, she states, “[d]oubts and suspicions arose in my heart for the first and last time, thank Heaven. Was it possible that American prejudices against colour had some root here? (73). Paravisini-Gebert interprets Seacole’s doubt in this scene as a dramatic way of instilling the idea of the “destructive power of racism” in the minds of her audience (75). Later in this scene, Seacole expresses her sadness at the outcome of these events, recalling,

Tears streamed down my foolish cheeks, as I stood in the fast thinning streets; tears of grief that any should doubt my motives – that Heaven should deny me the opportunity I sought. Then I stood still, and looking upward through and through the dark clouds that shadowed London, prayed for help. (Seacole 74)

Paravisini-Gebert focuses on what she describes as Seacole’s “theatricality” but is also intrigued by “the ways in which [the passage] appears to mask Seacole’s true meaning while simultaneously underscoring it” (75). Paravisini-Gebert is partially correct in her assessment; there is some manipulation of the audience in this passage using an emotional appeal. Years passed between the occurrence and the telling, giving Seacole ample time to construct a description guaranteed to receive the most evocative response. However, at the time, Seacole was probably very hurt that she, the Creole doctress who was so successful in Jamaica and Panama, was being rejected all over London while trying to serve her country. Paravisini-Gebert fails to factor in Seacole’s attachment to Empire, as, throughout *Wonderful Adventures*, Seacole describes herself as both a Creole and as a British subject.

For Seacole, race is secondary, which is why Seacole is shocked when she is not respected or treated with dignity by the English simply “because [her] blood flowed beneath a somewhat duskier skin than theirs” (74). Seacole was probably reduced to tears because she was ridiculed, ignored, and rebuffed; it was not only the number of rejections but their dismissive delivery. What is intriguing about Seacole is that she does not seem to understand or realise that she is different from other British subjects; her complexion simply is. She is the product of the relationship between a Creole woman and a Scottish man. Her husband was not only an English man but reportedly the illegitimate son or the godson of Captain Horatio Nelson, yet Seacole does not revel in her husband’s family origins or in the fact that he is English and married to her,

a Creole. There are no long discussions of race and difference in Seacole's text because she does not consider herself drastically different from anyone else. Seacole is as proud of her Creole heritage as she is of her Scottish legacy. In addition, Seacole knows that she is an exceptional healer. She refers to herself repeatedly throughout the text as a "doctress" and gives enough information about her success in this field to let her audience know that she is very capable. Buoyed by self-confidence, Seacole confronts English racism when she experiences it. Seacole, as a loyal British subject, cannot express her frustration with racism directly; she is still a subject of the Empire directly challenging the systems holding it in place. However, she can utilise an emotional appeal and a dramatic scene, such as describing her tears on the cold, dark London street and her prayers directed to Heaven, to make her point.

Brereton observes that historically, women have left fewer traces of their existences than men; "most of what they created has vanished forever, and men have monopolized the written word" (144). The dearth in historical written records left by women in general and women of colour specifically is to be expected as, before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women were less literate and educated than men (Edwards and Dabydeen 165). While Brereton agrees that a woman's voice can be captured by fiction, she notes that other media, such as family papers, letters, memoirs, and journals have also been effective although women's records in the Caribbean were isolated to European women or the "white creole elite" (145). In addition, Brereton, citing French scholar M. Perrot, notes that women spoke more than they wrote; this assertion is more applicable to Caribbean women than Europeans, indicating that Caribbean women's literature was largely in the form of orature and was less likely to be recorded or even remembered (144). It is in this area of exclusion and silence for Caribbean women of colour—this liminal space in which every

possibility for creativity exists—that Mary Prince and Mary Seacole construct their life stories and challenge the British master narrative.

Allahar notes that Prince and Seacole

afford us an insight into the practical and intellectual worlds of very different women and into their multifaceted struggles whether as slaves, as women, as free coloureds, as rape victims, and finally as silenced products of colonial brutality (128).

Prince and Seacole, in “humanizing themselves through their autobiographies...are able to expose the dehumanizing conditions under which so many millions were erased” (Allahar 128).

For Prince and Seacole, challenging the social norms under which they lived is not simply their attempts at expressing frustration at the physically or emotionally dehumanising conditions they endured but giving logical explanations for their frustrations. Although there is a strong

likelihood that Prince’s slave narrative does not represent an exact depiction of her words, there is also support for the theory that the ideas and fundamental beliefs expressed are hers. The anger

directed at the institution of slavery and the frustration of the slave emancipated only because he or she has been transported to England is clear in her narrative although the language employed

reflects more education than Prince received. In Seacole’s travelogue, the frustrations surrounding her attempt at volunteering to be a Crimean War nurse are clearly articulated.

Although Seacole does not directly discuss any suspicions about Nightingale’s contribution to her multiple rejections, she neither shies away from mentioning her unpleasant interactions with

Nightingale’s “flunkeys” nor avoids discussing her single, brief, brusque meeting with Nightingale.

These texts challenge the British master narrative trope, which is a text written by a White, English-born, middle class male. In their autobiographies, Prince and Seacole interrupt

the British master narrative—first by telling the story of the woman of colour, both slave and free, and second by challenging the notion that a British text can only be written by a ‘traditional’ Briton, one who is born and reared in England rather than by a Caribbean migrant writer. Prince’s and Seacole’s version of giving backchat, which occur in the form of autobiography, creates a space in the British canon for future generations of migrant writers throughout the UK who might not be considered traditionally ‘British’ in the truest sense but who have a strong attachment to either the Empire or post-Empire Britain. In creating a space for themselves and others like them in the British canon, Prince and Seacole are the first Caribbean female writers to give backchat in literature. Mary Prince and Mary Seacole can also be credited with ushering in an era of British writing—Caribbean female migrant writing in Britain.

## Joyce Gladwell: Searching for Spirituality Away from Home

Out of the Shadows  
leaping  
into the light  
of self knowledge.

from “Out of the Shadows” by Eintou Pearl Springer

By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, a significant number of Caribbean immigrants and migrant workers were living in Britain, yet few Caribbean female writers were published in the UK. Of this group, only one author produced an autobiography. If more Caribbean women did produce autobiographies in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, they seem to be lost to literary history; over 100 years passed between the release of Mary Seacole’s autobiography and another personal narrative from a Caribbean female immigrant writer in the UK. That autobiography is Joyce Gladwell’s *Brown Face, Big Master* (1969).

Joyce Gladwell (nee Nation) was born in Harewood, St. Catherine, Jamaica in 1931 to school teachers Donald and Daisy Nation. Gladwell and her twin sister, Faith Elaine Linton, grew up in a home environment that many might consider restrictive but others might classify as overly-protective. In this small town and in her middle-class family, Gladwell was indoctrinated into a strong sense of Anglican-influenced spirituality. It was also in this family, with its high expectations and strict moral code, that Gladwell began to have doubts about her connection to God and her role in a divine plan. Gladwell’s autobiography is a Caribbean female migrant narrative discusses Caribbean, middle-class Christianity and the subject of spirituality. Throughout the text, Gladwell questions the notion of Christian forgiveness, particularly exercised by a Black woman from the Caribbean, within England’s oftentimes xenophobic society of the 1950s and 1960s, and in Jamaica’s middle class, which is preoccupied with colourism. Gladwell also describes growing up in the Caribbean pre-independence and the

burden to become more 'English' despite being at a geographic and cultural distance from this goal. While Gladwell employs a subtler approach than Mary Prince or Mary Seacole, her text also gives backchat. Gladwell is concerned with describing her path to attaining a closer relationship with God as she discusses colourism in the Caribbean and its impact on other elements of society, including class and religious affiliation. Later in her narrative, like other Black writers she expresses frustration with the limitations placed on her by race; as a woman, she questions the roles of wife and mother and whether an intellectual woman can find fulfilment in domestic pursuits. Gladwell's migrant narrative, the text of a Black, female, middle-class writer, is a response to the White, male, British master narrative, reaffirming that autobiography can be woman's work and that deep and personal examination of spirituality should not be relegated to male-authored religious tracts but can be authored by women of faith.

Gladwell's Caribbean female immigrant or migrant autobiography seems less involved with making a socio-political statement than some of the other autobiographies by writers of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century although she often mentions race and racism. For example, the title alone of Beryl Gilroy's *Black Teacher* could classify the text as making a socio-political statement especially as she is describing a historical period during which 'Black' teachers were uncommon in England. Gladwell's autobiography differs from others like Gilroy's by focusing more on spirituality than on her Black, immigrant, female subjectivity. The constant and lifelong grappling with faith provides Gladwell's text with a unique topic and subjectivity that are not often addressed in Caribbean female immigrant texts and challenges the persistent silence of Caribbean migratory writers about spirituality and depression. Gladwell's discussion of her decades-long process to overcome depression and arrive at a comfortable level of spirituality seems more independent of race, class, and nationality than Prince's or Seacole's narrative. In

Prince's slave narrative, the idea of a just God provides comfort and salvation to a slave, whereas in Seacole's travelogue, God is called on to bear witness to the bigoted rejections she faces attempting to volunteer. Gladwell's autobiography explores the long, soul-searching process involved in being a woman of colour in societies and extended families that attempt, not necessarily negate, but to avoid her existence.

Historically, Black women<sup>15</sup> utilised spirituality to gain strength during difficult times (Heath 162). Perhaps the best example of this phenomenon in a Caribbean migrant narrative is Mary Prince joining the Moravian Church in defiance of the Woods and drawing strength and comfort from her Christian faith. Gladwell's emphasis on spirituality suggests an alternative goal. Given the historical period of Gladwell's narrative, the topic of spirituality allows Gladwell to displace her confrontations with British racism and xenophobia to her relationship with God. Her avoidance, as in other immigrant narratives, could be a version of the attitudes espoused by immigrant characters such as Winston Jacob in Andrea Levy's *Every Light in the House Burning* (1994), whose goal is to live in England unobserved. However, Gladwell's preoccupation with spirituality, while displacing anxieties about race, may also be a challenge—a retrospective declaration of 'Enough!' from a woman struggling to be a good Christian in an extended family, society, and even religious group that viewed her only as a Black immigrant rather than as an individual worthy of inclusion and respect. Gladwell's discussion of faith, which is a topic that Caribbean migrant writers typically avoid, is her version of giving backchat—frankly discussing a deeply personal topic in a public space. A Black woman publicly discussing faith and depression is also an example of giving backchat because, while “the icon of [Black women's] strength encourages resiliency and independence, it also discourages black women from

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<sup>15</sup> The implication of the term 'Black women' here is of the 'African diaspora' or 'Western' rather than of the African continent.

admitting weakness, sadness, and the need for help” (Harris-Perry 244). Gladwell faces and confides her internal struggles throughout her narrative. Melissa Harris-Perry observes, “[f]aith in a benevolent and loving God is a common tool black women employ to straighten out the crooked room of race and gender stereotypes” (222). For Gladwell, race and gender are critical elements of her marginalisation in Jamaica and England although she relegates these factors to subtopics in her narrative. Faith can be an effective coping mechanism for Black women living in hostile environments to maintain emotional and psychological stability. Being a Black female immigrant in a predominantly White-populated nation can constitute a hostile environment. Gladwell’s text also recounts her journey to self-discovery—embracing spirituality after years of self-doubt and internal conflict. To understand Gladwell’s struggle with depression and spirituality better, it is important to examine the term spirituality and locate its connection to mental health.

Anthropologist Corliss D. Heath defines spirituality as a search for meaning that is connected to an individual’s most critical life issues and concerns (158). Spirituality is “a connectedness to God or a Supreme Being,” serving as “a personal or communal source of liberation, solace, hope, meaning..., centering, strength, willingness to cope, as well as an understanding and acceptance of self” (Heath 159). Heath concludes that spirituality is “a broad concept, with no boundaries”; nonetheless, it is critical to Black women—particularly regarding mental health—because within this group spirituality provides a connection to God, which functions as a coping mechanism (158). Gladwell’s autobiography, which begins with a retrospective look at her childhood, addresses her search for a connection to God although she sometimes feels distanced from Him. Perhaps spirituality is critical to immigrant and migrant women because they experience external stressors, such as racism, sexism, and economic

disparities in a foreign setting often without family and with limited social support. While Gladwell grapples with spirituality throughout her life, it is her time away from her parents' home and away from Jamaica that tests her spiritual strength.

Gladwell notes the intersection of spiritual doubts and depression in her narrative; by openly addressing her bouts of depression, she places emphasis on a mental condition that “[s]trong Black-Women” can overcome (Edge and Rogers 2005 as quoted in Edge 43). Mental health researcher Dawn Edge posits that Black Caribbean women are more likely to believe that coping mechanisms such as physical exercise or spirituality are sufficient to combat depression in part because of the stigma attached to this illness as well as their own perceived strength (43). Gladwell’s open vulnerability dispels this false narrative of Black female strength while her willingness to rely on family, friends, and church community helps to alleviate her depression. While Gladwell cannot normalise depression, her frank discussions minimise the stigma attached to the term, its sufferers, and makes Black female sufferers of depression seem less anomalous.

Gladwell’s autobiography can be divided into sections based on her moves from one location to another, both local and international, and her experiences with bouts of depression resulting from those migrations as well as her doubts about God and faith. During these crises of faith and migrations, Gladwell addresses her own issues with colourism<sup>16</sup> while experiencing overt and covert racist incidents. Like other Caribbean female migrant autobiography authors, such as Jean Rhys and Gilroy, Gladwell is candid about events –even those that might increase her discomfort or encourage criticism. While issues of race, colourism, class, and gender are consistent factors in Caribbean female texts, Gladwell’s autobiography differs because of its pen

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<sup>16</sup> Colourism is intra-racial discrimination against people with darker complexions by those who are of lighter complexions. For example, Blacks with fairer complexions may discriminate against other Blacks who have darker complexions. For more information, see Taunya Lovell Banks’ “Colourism: A Darker Shade of Pale” (1999) at [heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/uclalr47&div=50&id=&page=](http://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/uclalr47&div=50&id=&page=)

discussion of spirituality, faith, and depression. Her doubts, as she states throughout the narrative, may originate in her childhood with her immediate family's fixation on class and colour.

Gladwell addresses the strong influence and over-protective nature of her mother, noting, "My mother took great pains in bringing us up" and the girls "lived a protected, unadventurous life," not only in comparison to their younger brother but to the other girls in Harewood as well (52). From Gladwell's perspective, they "were [their mother's] precious daughters, carefully schooled and moulded as a work [sic] of art" (Gladwell 60). Like pieces of art, Gladwell and her sister were posed as miniature adults—the products of Daisy's desire to produce "proper" English girls modelled on "the English princesses" (Gladwell 52). These standards are difficult, if not impossible, to live up to for a child. However, Daisy was competing with a social environment in which there were several barriers to her daughters' success. Gladwell's parents were teachers benefitting from the prestige attached to this social role, but they were still Black Jamaicans living as colonial subjects in a country that was considered no more than an imperial outpost. Gladwell admits that, she "learnt early that to be white was very desirable and to be black a misfortune" (68). This statement differs from other Jamaican writers, such as Una Marson, who embraced being Black in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when Black pride was not popular. Sociologists JeffriAnne Wilder and Colleen Cain believe that while Black pride is lauded within the family, it is also in this domestic space that "Black families can simultaneously cultivate an internalized skin tone bias" (578). While colourism was expressed within the family and, in Gladwell's opinion, "a family affliction," the Nation's attitudes reflected not only Jamaican society at the time but the British and European view of race in the 1930s (68). Theorist Margaret Hunter believes that colourism is rooted in the "European colonial project," which

established the superiority of White beauty aesthetic to the rejection and marginalisation of all others, leading to the perception that “dark skin represents savagery, irrationality, ugliness, and inferiority,” whereas “White skin” and “whiteness” are “civility, rationality, beauty, and superiority” (238). Daisy seemed to be focused, albeit in a roundabout way, on imbuing her girls with some sense of pride, using the girls’ light brown complexions, their White ancestors, and her and Donald's own light complexions. The world the Nation girls inhabited was primed to view them in negative terms for being Black, so Daisy steered them in another direction of identity away from blackness.

Daisy was also competing against a social perspective of Afro-Jamaican women as fit for extra-marital relationships but not marriage. In *Family and Colour in Jamaica* (1953), Fernando Henriques notes that the tradition of promiscuity during slavery had a lasting impact on Jamaica at the time of his research in the summer of 1946 (84). A perusal of the journals of White planters in the pre-emancipation period, most notably Trevor Burnard’s examination of Thomas Thistlewood’s journal, point to the sexually-predatory nature of slave masters as the norm. Burnard notes that Thistlewood’s “sexual appetite appears less that of a Caribbean Casanova than the unnatural and bestial longings of a quintessential sexual predator and rapist” (loc. 503). Thistlewood raped female slaves regularly and recorded the assaults in his journal. While Thistlewood’s journal is difficult to read because of his general treatment of female Jamaican slaves, it helps explain why 200 years later Daisy would place so much emphasis on maintaining her daughters’ innocence and purity.

At the beginning of Gladwell’s narrative, she wrote a poem about a woman “living with a man to whom she is not married” (line 16). Gladwell, who is a child in the poem observing this woman, notes that “she was caught/like a fowl in a coop” (lines 25-26). This intimate

relationship, which should comfort and sustain the woman, is a trap “and for the moment she was frantic to escape” (Gladwell line 29). While Gladwell acknowledges that she “was like that woman,” there is also a great distance separating them extending beyond the differences between a woman and a child (line 30). They are separated by this “problem of concubinage,” which is a circumstance that Gladwell did not share with this lonely woman sitting in a church, but the possibility existed that as an adult Gladwell could become like the woman in her poem and many other Black Caribbean women who were mistresses and lovers but never wives (Gladwell line 35).

Despite the social conservatism of Caribbean societies in general, Caribbean women and men of all races engage in sexual relationships outside of marriage and these unions often produce children. Social policy theorist E. Aracelis Francis’ research indicates that in Jamaica, “there are many unplanned, out-of-wedlock pregnancies and many extramarital affairs” (148). In 1931, the year Gladwell was born, the percentage of illegitimate births in Jamaica was 71.76 percent (Henriques 74). Even by contemporary standards, this number is high; however, given the conservative nature of Caribbean societies, the figure is excessive. A significant population of children born outside of legitimised relationships and the social stigma attached to their mothers probably influenced Daisy to guard her daughters’ chastity, protecting them from becoming mistresses and not legal wives. In addition, it may not have escaped Daisy’s notice that race and class were interwoven with mistress status. Francis notes that upper- and middle-class men tend to seek sexually-gratifying extramarital relationships with working-class women because their wives are not expected to be sexually stimulating or stimulated and the assumption is that working-class women are both (148). This phenomenon mirrors relationships in the antebellum Southern US in which White males engaged in sexual activities with their wives for

procreation but had forced or consensual sexual relationships with female slaves because of the stigma attached to White women enjoying sexual intercourse. Feminist theorist bell hooks notes in her ground-breaking text *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981) that the stereotype of “black women [as] possessors of a heightened sexuality encouraged white male rapists and sexual exploiters” after emancipation (62). The chattel slave, who was considered at best a lesser human or at worst an animal, was presumed to enjoy any form of sexual interaction at any age. Because Black girls and women were stereotyped as being lascivious in slavery and post-slavery societies, perhaps upper- and middle-class men in the Caribbean adopted a similar position about working-class, darker-skinned women and their sexual appetites. Among the Caribbean middle class during the 1940s, a Christian marriage was ideal, and any other relationship was considered “abnormal” (Henriques 145). Therefore, becoming a mistress could jeopardise a middle-class woman’s class status.

While Gladwell’s mother shielded her daughters, her over-protective nature also created a need for perfection, stimulating doubts about God, the “Big Master” of the book’s title, raising questions about faith and reinforcing class boundaries. Daisy separated the twins from their classmates, placing class boundaries between the girls and their other children because they were “teacher daughter” [sic], but this segregation exacerbated this social alienation (Gladwell 52). However, her efforts were largely unnecessary as “the other children did not treat [them] as equals,” avoiding the girls because of their social status (Gladwell 52). There was also the fear that the girls would share classmates’ secrets with their mother, but this was an unfounded concern as Daisy prevented the other children from telling her girls anything by telling her students that her “children [told] her everything” (59). Gladwell admits that her and Faith’s social isolation and voracious reading made them “spectators, full of brooding thoughts, seeking

satisfaction from inside [themselves] and conscious of a growing dissatisfaction” (53). Their constant introspection in combination with a fear of disappointing created self-conscious children who obsessed about faith. Perhaps Gladwell’s constant childhood introspection, social isolation, and high middle-class expectations provide contributing factors to her life-long struggles with depression. There is considerable research available linking childhood trauma to adult depression (Weiss et al 1999; Heim and Nemeroff 2001; Heim et al 2008). Psychologist Julia C. Poole et al found a correlation between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and adult depression (89). ACEs include “childhood emotional, physical, and sexual abuse; emotional and physical neglect; and household dysfunction: (Poole et al 90). At some point in her childhood, Gladwell began to wonder where she stood in relation to being “a friend of God,” meaning, perhaps, one who is completely faithful, a believer, and has a spiritual connection to God (66). These doubts arose in Gladwell’s mind before she entered secondary school at age eleven.

Gladwell’s childhood marked the first of many instances in which she experienced deep-seated fear and extreme anxiety, leading to a bout of depression. Gladwell is clear about not assigning blame to her mother for her crises of faith or their resulting emotional strain. Instead, perhaps there may be a correlation between the various versions of Christianity practiced in Jamaica and their expressions prompting these questions and doubts. Gladwell describes a rather straightforward Anglican upbringing; however, in her town and even in her home, different expressions of faith and belief competed. For example, her family’s maid, Cookie, was married to the pastor of the town’s Church of God, which Gladwell refers to as a “Wash-foot church” (63). While Gladwell acknowledges that even as a child she appreciated Cookie’s faith and sincerity, “the expression of [that religion] was ludicrous, and revolting” to her (63). The description of the religious practices of the Church of God as both “ludicrous, and revolting”

suggests that African-influenced religions did not receive the same respect as religions with European influence.

There was also a Seventh-day Adventist congregation in Harewood, which Gladwell admired because of their willingness to try to convert others. Despite Gladwell's mild admiration for the Seventh-day Adventists, the religion lacked appeal for her. There is a possibility that Daisy, more so than her father, who Gladwell describes as indifferent to colourism, viewed her daughters following Anglicanism as another method of adopting whiteness and claiming Britishness by adhering to a religion firmly rooted in English culture. In Jamaica during Gladwell's childhood and adolescence, "Anglican and Roman Catholic churches [carried] a higher prestige value than other groups"; the 1943 Jamaican census reports that these two religions comprised 54.1 percent of the population with Anglican followers leading at 28.3 percent (Henriques 76 and 77). As Gladwell's family was middle class, it was probably more socially acceptable for them to remain in the Anglican Church, which ultimately meant a rejection of other religions without a strong European heritage or that appealed to working-class Black Jamaicans. In rejecting local churches and their followers, Gladwell reaffirms her affiliation with the middle class and distances herself from working-class Black Jamaicans. Gladwell's description of the Church of God and the Seventh-day Adventist suggests embarrassment by and discomfort with their 'primitive' services and a rejection of religious practices with less restraint. Gladwell seems uncomfortable with the ceremonies attached to these religions as well as with the practitioners, who are largely from the working and lower classes and are also most likely much darker complexioned than her family.

Gladwell states that the family's dark-complexioned servant Cookie "did not please the eyes" (62). While Gladwell the child had to respect Cookie as an adult, she intimates that the

unpleasantness of Cookie's physical appearance was compounded by her religious beliefs. It was a common practice in slave societies for White slave owners to educate and free their children who were born of slave mothers thus creating a strong Afro-Caribbean middle class that was light-complexioned, skilled, and educated (Henriques 26). This practice also created and maintained working and lower classes that were largely darker-complexioned. Cookie's 'blackness' was unpleasant to Gladwell because Daisy's influence; Gladwell was inculcated from childhood to reject any factor that represented being 'Black' in favour of 'White', which represented 'Englishness'. Religions, such as the Church of God and the Seventh-day Adventist, veered more towards 'blackness' than 'whiteness'. There was less propriety in these church services than in the Anglican services that Gladwell attended, which could explain their appeal among these groups. For example, Fernando Henriques observed in 1953 that "the membership of the 'native' or cult bodies is exclusively composed of the black lower class" (77).

Henriques' research distinguishes between "native," "orthodox," and "cult" religious groups, noting that orthodox religions are those steeped in European tradition whereas native religions "may be either specifically Jamaican or American" (Henriques 78). Henriques concluded that cult groups appeal more to working-class Blacks because they "cater to the desire for emotional stimulation and excitement...prevalent in the lower class throughout Jamaica," but these desires "must be seen against the background of extreme poverty and lack of social opportunity" (78). Orthodox churches required certain attire for attendance, but "native" and "cult" religious groups did not, offering working-class Jamaicans during this period two options: attend an "orthodox" church but "gather outside the church during service" and "go away before the congregation" came out or attend service at a "cult group" meeting (78). Clothes indicate material wealth and social status in an orthodox church, whereas wealth and/or social status are

less important in a cult group, suggesting more acceptance and less judgment at a non-traditional than at a traditional religious service. As Gladwell's family was so firmly entrenched middle-class ideals, there was little chance of her gaining more than a rudimentary understanding of non-European religions or viewing them as valid forms of worship.

Black Jamaicans who chose to follow these alternative forms of Protestant Christianity probably sought a form of worship beyond the confines of European culture imposed on Afro-Caribbeans. Gladwell mentions a Seventh-day Adventist man she observed in public who openly stated that the Anglican "parson" was deceiving his parishioners (64). In Bob Marley's song "Talkin' Blues" (1974), he sings "Because I feel like bombing a church/Now, now that you know the preacher is lyin'," indicating working-class anger toward orthodox religions and their ministers. Historian Stephen Foehr interprets these lyrics as symbolising frustration from staring "into the light of truth, however painful" (15). Marley's lyrics about the preacher exposes "the Babylon teacher who taught a false history to the Jamaicans and all colonised peoples" (Foehr 15). Historically, European religions supported chattel slavery in the Americas and colonisation in other parts of the world; in time, colonised groups embraced Christianity. For example, theologian Joerg Rieger notes that the function of Spanish missions in 16<sup>th</sup> century Latin America was "to pacify the mission field and to regulate dissent," and US missions to 19<sup>th</sup> century post-independence Latin America were concerned with promoting American interests—particularly the Monroe Doctrine's emphasis on "a special interest of the U.S. in the affairs of both Americas" (203). Even in Africa, Christianity was both a tool and a weapon of colonialism. Historian F. K. Ekechi observes that "British military occupation of the Igbo country, and the political and social disruption that followed" contributed to wide-spread Igbo conversion to Christianity in the early 1900s (104). Ekechi notes that "[p]eople do not accept change" unless

there are “anticipated rewards that follow any innovation” (104). Igbos are considered receptive to change because they have an “uncanny sense of the comparative advantage involved” in changing (Ekechi 104). While soldiers typically harassed and robbed villages, some Christian villages were “treated with some measure of respect by British officials and in a few cases were freed from military patrols” (Ekechi 105). Therefore, many Igbos converted to Christianity.

The manipulation of the working class by orthodox Christian ministers and ensuing frustrations created an opportunity for alternative belief systems. The versions of Seventh-day Adventist and Church of God practiced in rural Jamaica during Gladwell’s childhood were likely forms of liberation theology much like Rastafari became in coming decades among the working poor of urban Jamaica. Then, Rastafarians were under the leadership of Leonard Percival Howell (1898-1981), who founded Pinnacle, the first Rastafarian commune, in 1940 (Foehr 25). Because of their appeal among socially and economically disenfranchised Blacks, religions like Seventh-day Adventist and Church of God probably faced reticence or rejection from the middle class and elites—particularly those of African descent who were trying to attain ‘whiteness’ by rejecting what they perceived to be symbols of their African heritage.

As Gladwell’s autobiography progresses from her childhood to adolescence, her concerns about faith and spirituality intensify after her first migration. At age eleven, Gladwell and her sister were enrolled in St Hilary’s boarding school for girls in Market Town, which was the environment Daisy wanted—“a community where [they] were well protected physically and morally” (Gladwell 71). Anne Spry Rush observes that West Indian schools in the 20<sup>th</sup> century pre-independence period mirrored English schools down to the minutest detail such as students using paper and ink imported from Britain; Caribbean children received a solid education based on an existing model and acquiring Englishness in the process (36). While Anglophone

Caribbean boarding school has long disappeared, psychoanalyst Joy Schaverien notes that “the British exported this system all over the world” but not to the benefit of the children (684). St Hilary’s was no different in this regard; Gladwell notes that “resemblance between St Hilary’s and an English girls’ boarding school was far from accidental” (77). The girls at St Hilary’s were taught to reject much of their Jamaican identity, beginning with the removal of what Gladwell classifies as Jamaican “dialect” from their everyday speech, resulting in a “sense of loss” not simply of language but of its familiarity and comfort (78).

While Gladwell admits that St Hilary’s gave her a sound academic foundation, the school shielded her from exposure to the everyday experiences of average Jamaicans, which was probably the point of an English school in the pre-independence Caribbean. In addition to reinforcing Gladwell’s somewhat inflated ego and her tendency to be self-righteous, she notes that “the moral climate of St Hilary’s was severe” and that there “was only one choice to be made – the moral choice, whether to obey or defy authority” (82). This mindset was probably common at English boarding schools and influenced their disciplinary practices. To most children, occasionally flaunting the rules is natural behaviour consistent with this period of life and soon forgotten. However, to a child such as Gladwell with fixed ideas about her own self-importance, an overwhelming desire to succeed, and who struggled constantly with faith and spirituality, the environment at St Hilary’s only exacerbated her spiritual dilemmas. Gladwell admits that while the rules facilitated smoother living conditions for many cohabitants, she “did not need so much to be restrained as to learn to use freedom” (83).

Gladwell’s own conscience served her well in following rules, but the long-term outcomes of her experiences at St Hilary’s were damage to her self-esteem and exacerbating “feelings of self-condemnation” due largely to the disciplinary practices at St Hilary’s (84). The

girls were “reprimanded, not tolerantly, humorously, acknowledging the triviality of the offence, but fiercely and sternly as if it were a grave misdemeanour” (84). Anthropologist Jonathan Benthall found that in English boarding schools well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, corporal punishment was the norm, but these “tribal traditions” had additional purposes (382). One of these purposes was to promote a “ritual of authority” through punishments that was “exported to Empire” (Benthall 386). While Gladwell does not disclose corporal punishment, it is intriguing that she would experience such terror at the mere thought of being disciplined, suggesting that St Hilary’s was a true English boarding school, replete with corporal punishment. Therefore, Gladwell began to make moral choices out of fear rather than because the decisions were right. This fear could also be attributed to Gladwell’s childhood anxieties about inadequately living her faith, but the intensity of this new preoccupation and her emotional response indicates that St Hilary’s was the source.

Gladwell’s time at St Hilary’s was one of learning about academic subjects and English customs, but St Hilary’s did not prepare her for living in the real world with its moral dilemmas, disorganisation, and ambiguities. Schaverien notes that “[p]eople who attended boarding school are frequently high achievers but sometimes with surprisingly little emotional literacy” (686). Emotional literacy is the collection of “skills, strategies, maps, and tools” learnt to become “emotionally fluent” (Bocchino xxii). While Gladwell felt that St Hilary’s did not prepare her for life, her ability to carefully unfold and analyse her experiences indicates a high level of emotional literacy. While Gladwell does not provide details about the form of punishments students received, she does broach the subject. To admit that her experiences at St Hilary’s were not ideal and to challenge the school’s practices—particularly in writing—is radical. Schaverien believes that while many children who attended boarding schools suffered trauma, few will

admit it because boarding school is considered a privilege—one that parents sacrificed to give a child—and the expense means that the child should be grateful (685). Gladwell never condemns St Hilary’s, but she does admit that the school environment was not always conducive to the long-term well-being of Black Jamaican children. During her time as a student at St Hilary’s, Gladwell experienced what she described as her “first moral crisis,” which led to the first in a series of severe bouts of depression that would span the next 13 years (95).

Gladwell was determined to go to England because her “mind and imagination were fed on English scenes and English thoughts” (80). Viewing the Caribbean as connected to England was a common position in the pre-independence period. Late actor Cy Grant (1919-2010) stated, “Grenada was certainly part of England”; therefore, England was “the only place to come” and “like going to finishing school” for West Indians (Phillips and Phillips 13). Although immigrating to England was Gladwell’s dream, she was disappointed when her twin sister received a scholarship to study in England, but she did not. Faith deferred her enrolment for a year, remaining in Jamaica to teach at a training college, and they were separated for the first time. Within a few months of her graduation from St Hilary’s, Gladwell was asked to return to the school as a teacher, which she gladly did, but before Gladwell could return to the safety and continuity of life at St Hilary’s, she experienced a bout of depression brought on by her separation from Faith. Gladwell writes eloquently of this separation from her life-long companion stating, “The consciousness of shared experience which had lasted almost unbroken since our infancy was cut off” (103). The use of the term “cut off” is reminiscent of severing a limb, which is likely how Gladwell felt after separating from her sister for the first time. Research on attachment bonds indicates that Gladwell’s response to her separation from Faith was natural. Psychologists Caroline M. Tancredy and R. Chris Fraley state that there are four

features of an attachment bond: proximity maintenance, separation distress, safe haven, and secure base (79). When Gladwell and Faith were separated as adolescents, Gladwell lost proximity to Faith. Then, she experienced distress because of the distance from Faith, who Gladwell probably considered her haven. Faith's absence also meant that Gladwell lost her secure base. Typical of Gladwell in her formative years, any disappointment led to a crisis of faith which in turn caused depression because she could not reconcile her beliefs with the reality of her life. During this period, Gladwell visited her sister at the training college, mentioning that on the bus ride she threw "out a challenge in bitterness and resentment to God...to prove that He was a loving and just God in spite of what appeared to [her] to be His injustice and hardness" (Gladwell 103). This challenge was self-imposed to test her spirituality, which typically returns Gladwell to her childhood state of wondering whether she is a "friend of God" (Gladwell 66).

Teaching at St Hilary's gave Gladwell the structure and order of her adolescence, but this migration also brought her face-to-face with a spiritual crisis, which she refers to as a "religious battle" that "grew fiercer" (104). As Gladwell struggled with repeating the same patterns, she had an opportunity to participate in Jamaican cultural events. At Knox College, she attended the "first summer in Jamaican arts and drama" where she and other young Jamaicans began seeing the development of their own dramatic arts and writing that were "not handed on from other cultures" (Gladwell 106). Gladwell is describing a national Jamaican arts movement initiated by late artist and activist Edna Manley (1900-1987) in the 1930s. By the 1940s, Manley and other artists offered art classes, which were the foundation of visual arts programmes in Jamaica (Laduke 38). Sociologist Oliver Benoit posits that a "country's national identity...defines and explains the meaning and form of art" (567). Therefore, regional and/or national art, such as Caribbean or specifically Jamaican art, becomes a part of national identity (Benoit 568). Despite

this burgeoning sense of Jamaican national consciousness, Jamaicans were still preoccupied with “Colour” and “Class” (Gladwell 109). Gladwell is forced to address both when she is invited to play tennis at a local club by a White English teacher. While she believes the invitation is sincere, “the tennis club in Market Town admitted only white and near-whites” (109). This description is of a space divided by colour, maintaining the colonial social order. Gladwell admits that she would not challenge the club’s unspoken colour bar because she was “weak and unwilling as if [she] agreed with this rejection of [her] person, because [her] skin was too brown, [her] hair” too “kinky” (109). In the face of imperial structures, such as this Whites-only club, there is little Gladwell could do, yet her description of the club and its bias offers a rebuttal to the overall oppression imposed by the British Empire on its subjects. St Hilary’s was an excellent hiding place from the world, after this experience Gladwell understood that racism permeated every aspect of Jamaican life. This realisation is not entirely enlightening as it does not prompt Gladwell to address her own colourism and its contribution to the social order. Instead, she focuses on social incidents of racism and using her spiritual conundrums to address this issue.

In 1951, Gladwell migrated from Jamaica to England to continue her education at London University, joining her sister after a two-year separation. Gladwell’s migration places her, historically, in the *Windrush* generation, yet, unlike many female *Windrush* migrants whose narratives have been recorded in collections<sup>17</sup>, race and racism within the framework of the immigrant experience are superseded by Gladwell’s spiritual struggle. Her journey on a banana boat, which seems innocuous, tests her spiritual connection to God when she is sexually assaulted by the ship’s doctor. Gladwell is invited to the doctor’s cabin to peruse his manuscript,

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<sup>17</sup> For additional information, see *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (1998) by Phillips and Phillips; *Motherland: West Indian Women in Britain in the 1950s* (1984) by Dodgson; and *The Heart of the Race: Black Women’s Lives in Britain* (1985) by Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe.

but she does not question why he values her opinion. Her innocence combined with her attempts at feigning sophistication overrule her instincts, and, before Gladwell fully realizes what is happening, she is trapped in his cabin on the receiving end of the doctor's unwanted attentions. Only "an unsuitable time of the month" saves her from the attack (Gladwell 114). Some women might react as Gladwell did—freezing, not daring to "make a dash for the door or resist him for fear of arousing him further—to violence perhaps" (114). Gladwell was afraid but, in that moment, she unwittingly hesitated to defend herself because she was socialised to be passive. Research by psychologist Erika L. Kelley et al suggests that the socialisation of women to be "passive and unassertive when they feel uncomfortable" can contribute to their victimisation (243). Because of prescribed gender roles, "women may subsequently believe that they do not have the right to protect themselves" (Kelley et al 243). Women like Gladwell who were reared in closed, religious-influenced environments may hesitate to defend themselves from a sexual assault because they subconsciously do not view self-defence as a right.

Kelley et al's research points to the external pressures prohibiting women from protecting themselves when facing a sexual assault. For Gladwell, her mother's influence as well as the social expectations for the "teacher [sic] daughter" provide additional factors preventing her from crying out for help or reporting the incident. Sociologist Marjorie R. Sable et al note that there are several "common barriers to reporting rape and sexual assault," but a study of "236 female victims of acquaintance rape" indicated that "guilt and self-blame" were the most significant blocks (158). Gladwell is traveling with other Jamaicans and a British crew; the humiliation of sexual assault would only be exacerbated if it became public. Amid these internal conflicts, Gladwell is also battling for her soul as she treats this event like a spiritual fall. She assumes the burden of guilt for going to the doctor's cabin instead of placing the blame on him

for attacking her—an innocent, sheltered young woman. This self-blame is indicative of the behaviour of an assault victim and of Gladwell’s lifelong spiritual struggles.

Gladwell also feels burdened at the end of this episode because of Daisy’s influence. Although Daisy is not present, her teachings are closely intertwined into Gladwell’s identity—particularly the concern that at some point Gladwell and Faith might fall from grace and become one of the many nameless, faceless, Black women around them like the woman in Gladwell’s poem. After the attack, Gladwell even imagines that to the doctor, she was nothing more than “an easy-going coloured girl” that he could romanticise about in the same way that Gauguin (1848-1903) fetishized his Tahitian female subjects (115). Here, Gladwell, if only briefly, acknowledges the impact of race on her assault by connecting the doctor to Gauguin and herself to Gauguin’s female subjects. Daisy’s expectations weigh on her, and, at the time of this event, Gladwell is afraid and feels humiliated. Her fear is driven by the doctor’s actions but also by her own feelings and motivations. Perhaps she feels that as a ‘lady’, she should not have accepted the doctor’s invitation. She may also feel ashamed for putting herself in a compromising situation with a man she did not know.

The lessons Gladwell received at home provide her with the strength to overcome challenges such as recovering from the sexual assault. However, Daisy’s influence and Gladwell’s spiritual conundrum make Gladwell internalise her guilt; she is acutely aware of what she escaped. Gladwell writes, “Thanks to [her] mother, [she] was aware in every detail of the disaster to [her] future plans which [she] had just risked and escaped” (115). She states, “I lost a little faith in myself, in myself as a virtuous person,” suggesting that this incident had an impact on the way Gladwell views herself after and may possibly continue to pose a spiritual challenge to her from that point forward (115). The guilt resulting from this incident raises the issue of

spirituality again and the sexual assault as a fall from grace, which Gladwell silently carries with her as she begins her new life in England.

When Gladwell arrives in London, she is reunited with her sister; she is also thrilled at the novelty of being in London and fascinated by the sights and history around her. Like most newly-arrived immigrants, Gladwell has financial needs that her mother and sister, who contribute to her support, cannot meet. For pocket money, Gladwell takes a job at a market stall in West Ham on Saturdays. She earns 15 shillings a day and is content with the position but expresses fear at encountering “Teddy boys” on the way to the tube (Gladwell 118). The Teddy boys were a subcultural group distinguishable by their Edwardian-revival attire first observed in London in the early 1950s (“Teddy Boys”). Historian Peter Fryer notes that in post-war London, the “ignorant majority” were prejudiced against anyone who was not White British, making “Every encounter with white people...a fresh hazard” for people of colour (375). Benjamin Bowling’s work on public violence in the post-war years mentions that around 1948 there was a slow and steady increase of violent acts against individual Blacks and Black communities (29). In the 1950s, the Teddy boys were typically involved in violence against people of colour in London, which explains Gladwell’s fear of encountering them on the way home. This brief expression of fear, stated in one sentence, seems typical of Gladwell, who is terrified of encountering the Teddy Boys but avoids the reason. She never mentions that they attack people of colour, which means that she again glosses over her role as a Black woman in a predominantly White nation. While race and racism are critical topics in discussions of the Caribbean immigrant experience in the UK, Gladwell deemphasises them, turning her attention to her quest for a more meaningful relationship with God.

Because of Gladwell's age and cultural difference from her classmates, her first year at London University was spent observing not participating; attempts at playing sports or attending parties were eventually abandoned. Her lack of interest in classical music, which may not seem particularly relevant, became an issue because classical music was the genre of choice at school-sponsored free music events. Despite these minor distractions, Gladwell soon turns her attention back to spirituality. Soon after arriving, Gladwell is at an event listening to a lecture by an Anglican clergyman and Missioner<sup>18</sup>. She is tempted to talk to him—to discover how there could be an “intellect that did not defy or cast doubt on God” combined with a “traditional religion that was alive, personal and zealous to win others” (121). At the end of the talk, Gladwell approaches the Missioner and declares, “I want to be a Christian but I do not want to do anything that is in bad taste” (121). This statement is telling as it articulates Gladwell's spiritual conflict, the influence of her middle-class Jamaican upbringing, and her unflinching dedication to the ‘norm’. Gladwell's conflict involves her attempt to be spiritual without behaving in a way contrary to her upbringing. There is a strong dedication to God, but there is also a reluctance to do anything that goes against her Anglican background. Also, Gladwell, like most people, does not want to be embarrassed by following a religion or demonstrating a religious belief differing from her concept of ‘normal’. She mentioned that as a child, she felt uncomfortable with non-traditional religions and their followers' demonstrative behaviour during religious services. From the perspective of a middle-class Jamaican child growing up in the 1940s, Gladwell's view on non-traditional religions was likely the norm. As stated previously, Henriques' research on religious affiliation in Jamaica during 1943 shows that together Anglicans and Roman Catholics made up 54.1 percent of the island's population (76). With the population majority following traditional,

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<sup>18</sup> Gladwell refers to the speaker as a Missioner but perhaps means missionary.

European-based religions, any other form of worship might seem deviant. Gladwell wants to prove her dedication to God and be a good Christian but is unsure of how to accomplish this goal. However, when the Missioner responds, “Do you think...that God would ask you to do anything that was in bad taste,” Gladwell begins to feel as if an obstacle has been removed from her path to gaining a deeper sense of spirituality (121). She no longer needs to worry about making a choice between following God and maintaining her self-respect.

Gladwell’s declaration about becoming a Christian soon has her visiting a variety of religious societies such as the Christian Movement<sup>19</sup>. She quickly becomes frustrated with the lack of direction and low attendance at Christian Movement meetings and decides to consider another organisation. Like Faith, Gladwell joins the Christian Union where she discovers “friendliness, a welcome, well-supported meetings and a clear purpose” (122). Gladwell also realises that she too is responsible for her distance from God. In the Christian Union, Gladwell encounters others, like herself, who struggle with spirituality. She finds them inspiring because instead of praying for “‘big’ causes, they prayed simply and directly about the trivial and banal things of their lives” (124) Previously, Gladwell avoided letting God into her life because she “did not want Him to interfere” and because she doubted that He cared about trivialities (129). However, by turning her prayers inward, she began to feel less personal failure—less responsibility for the human frailties that shaped the world. Gladwell began to rely more on God, feeling confident that “the firm ground that supported [her]...was God, and His work in Christ” (125). With this new feeling of security, Gladwell found that the “bottomlessness of [her] periods of depression went out of [her] life” (125).

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<sup>19</sup> The Student Christian Movement (SCM) began in 1889 as a network of students centred on overseas missionary work. The organisation claims that during the late 1950s it was heavily involved in national current social and political issues, but Gladwell provides no proof of this claim. For more information, see the Student Christian Movement website at [movement.org.uk/](http://movement.org.uk/)

This time in Gladwell's life—particularly her experimentation with campus-based Christian organisations—is unusual for a Caribbean immigrant narrative. Gladwell does not attempt to locate other Caribbeans at the University; there is no mention of other immigrant students. This avoidance suggests that Gladwell is not inclined to connect with immigrant and/or other minority students. Gladwell joins campus-based religious organisations rather than a Caribbean or an Anglican church. This seems like a rejection of the Anglican household she was reared in as well as of her Caribbean identity, which is closely entwined with her Anglican upbringing. From this point forward in Gladwell's narrative, especially during her time in England, there seems to be a concerted effort to avoid the topic of race, ignore her Caribbean heritage, and abandon Black Caribbean Anglicanism with its form and structure. However, while Gladwell often strays from these topics, they continue to provide an underlying theme for her narrative.

The next major challenge to Gladwell's spirituality was her intellectual life, and during her studies at London University, Gladwell found her "beliefs were shaken" (140). Theorist Shannon Chance et al note that "[s]ome students' academic experiences led to spiritual conflict marked by a questioning of prior beliefs, which was sometimes confusing and painful" (262). Gladwell has much in common with people of faith in academic settings for while colleges and universities offer courses in theology, institutions of higher learning are also sites of interrogation. In a location where questioning is expected and encouraged, it is easy to challenge the existence of a being that, while theoretically omniscient and omnipotent, is intangible. Questioning the existence of God may stem from the secularisation of higher education, or it may be the natural progression of any adolescent away from home and parental influence for the first time. Another possibility is that academic activities offer students "opportunities to question,

learn, and grow in their spirituality” (Chance et al 262). Gladwell never questions the existence of God but is regularly in situations in which she interacts with others who do. She notes that at university, she “met a general disparagement of Christianity,” and while she claims that her faith was shaken, she provides no proof that she abandons it (140). Instead, the information she received that challenged her faith also set her on a life-long journey “to read, to listen and to think in order to find the answers to the doubts cast on the Bible’s claims” (141). Typically, an academic environment stimulates “critical thinking which students then applied to spiritual issues” (Chance et al 262). Gladwell, ever the researcher, began looking for answers instead of simply accepting that her beliefs were illogical. Through this process, Gladwell also comes to the realisation that challenges to her faith could not only be resolved with research but that she had to depend “on God, in faith that solutions to these problems did exist” and “that God was able and willing to satisfy intellectual doubts” (142).

With Gladwell’s faith renewed, her studies progressing well, and her interpersonal relationships with faculty and colleagues growing, she soon falls into complacency. Gladwell allows herself to contemplate whether she needs God. She states, “I have everything I want...What do I need God for?” (143). Questioning the necessity of God in one’s life is a deviation from the typical immigrant narrative, which usually involves calling on God (Prince and Seacole) or avoiding the subject completely (Rhys and Gilroy). Again, Gladwell enters another cyclical pattern of doubt-fall-renewed faith when her old boyfriend from Jamaica writes to her, ending their relationship because he was engaged to another woman (143). Gladwell first confided her love for this theological student with ambitions of being a parson to Miss Hobbs at St Hilary’s when she was fifteen (76). Miss Hobbs, “[w]ith adult pessimism,” tried to describe the life of sacrifice and near-poverty Gladwell might expect as a parson’s wife, yet Gladwell held

on to this relationship through her time at St Hilary's as a student, later as a teacher, and into her migration to England (76). Perhaps there is some truth to the contention that the first love is the most painful because the loss of her first love sends Gladwell back to God and reading the Bible for comfort. While autobiographies, such as Rhys' *Smile Please* are replete with stories of lost loves and heartache, Gladwell's decision to turn to God for comfort is distinct. As Gladwell read Isaiah 53, she found, perhaps for the first time in her spiritual quest, that God was speaking to her, which is also a unique addition from the typical Caribbean immigrant narrative. While she admits that the "words did not all apply to [her] literally," she could feel that God was offering to heal her hurts, to give her back some of her lost dignity, and to offer her His friendship (144). At this point, Gladwell lets God into her heart, mind, and life, and when it was over, she states, "[t]he moment passed and I have not been able to recapture that ecstasy since" (144). Gladwell's description of her experience as "ecstasy" contributes to the religious tone. At this point, Gladwell's narrative shifts, incorporating religious content in the form of Biblical verses, which is unlike other Caribbean immigrant narratives.

Gladwell briefly mentions the issues of being a Black woman in a White country a few times in her autobiography. The incident with the ship's doctor was as much a matter of sex as it was a matter of the conquest and colonisation of the Black female body. Her fear of the Teddy boys and the physical threat they represented to Blacks was justified based on the reports of their violent behaviour. In Chapter XVIII, Gladwell states "England treated us well as overseas students" (132). She further explains, "[w]e were guests; our visit had a time limit and a specific purpose, and so the English were expansive and welcoming" (132). If the 'visitors' were going home, they were welcomed by Britons; however, if the visitors decide to remain, the attitude of British nationals to the newcomers changed. Perhaps this shift in attitude towards immigrants

was partially driven by a perception of “national decline and weakness...precipitated by the arrival of blacks” (Gilroy *Aint No Black* 46). Therefore, if Blacks remained, this national decline would continue. Gladwell gives examples of 4 separate incidents of an English ‘welcome’ influenced by race. One of these occasions she witnesses while the other three are directed at her. When she is told by an English man at dinner that “Colour is class,” Gladwell notes that despite her accomplishments, “here was a new limitation, fixing [her] till death in [her] place in society” (134). While this statement did not challenge her faith, it would become an issue a year after receiving the letter from her Jamaican boyfriend ending their relationship because one year later, she fell in love with Graham Gladwell.

Like Gladwell, Graham was a student, destined to be an academic, and a Christian from a ‘good’ family. When Gladwell first met Graham’s family, “as a visitor, an overseas student, [she] was well received and [she] felt at home” (146). However, when Gladwell and Graham announced their engagement to his family, “they firmly resisted [their] engagement” because “it would be ‘wrong’ for their son to have a coloured child, ‘wrong’ for [Gladwell] to have a white child” (146). In one brief meeting, Gladwell realises that Christianity does not prevent racist beliefs and attitudes as she experiences racism first hand from the people she hopes will become her family. Gladwell states, “Graham’s parents are deeply religious” but “even the Bible has been used to justify racial apartheid” (147). Despite being a ‘good’ Christian family, the Gladwells were less than thrilled at the prospect of having a Black, Caribbean in-law. While she could not know exactly what “ideas lay buried in their hearts,” the initial reaction and subsequent arguments against their union were indicative of the family’s inherent racism, which Gladwell felt so overwhelmed by that she “escaped...returned to Jamaica” where her “parents accepted what [she] told them without pain or questioning,” leaving Graham to continue the battle with his

parents (147). This family, which Gladwell credits with having “a direct and open acknowledgement of God,” found the possibility including a Black woman into their family completely unacceptable and used God as a justification for their prejudice, suggesting that British racism cut a deep and wide path—even through White Britons claiming to have a close relationship with God (146).

Historically, interracial relationships in the UK were viewed with suspicion or reservations. Fryer’s survey of newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets written in the 18<sup>th</sup> century mention that while Blacks taking jobs from White Britons was a concern, the increase in interracial relationships and the children produced by these relationships presented a larger problem. One of Fryer’s 1773 sources states that interracial relationships had one goal—that of the “vain hopes of washing the Blackamoor white” (156). This statement suggests that to Britons miscegenation carries the possible threat of Blacks who are fair-complexioned enough to blend in and, in the process, challenge ideas of both whiteness and Englishness. In the 1950s when Gladwell and Graham were engaged, views on miscegenation had not changed much since the statements made in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This fear is exacerbated by a “new racism...primarily concerned with mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion” (Gilroy *Ain’t No Black* 45). With biracial children who belong to White British ‘us’ and Black Caribbean ‘them’, the politics of inclusivity and exclusivity simply do not apply, and without clear lines of racial demarcation, national racial identity is impossible to maintain.

When Gladwell encountered the various prejudicial arguments from Graham’s parents, it was the first time in her life anyone used God and faith as an explanation and justification for discrimination. However, the shock of biased treatment neither separates Gladwell from her relationship with God nor from Graham. Despite her shock, the bias of Graham’s family, and the

realisation that race and class are inextricably linked in the minds of many White Britons, Gladwell develops a womanist theological consciousness. Womanist theology uses Black women's experiences "to challenge the tripartite ills of racism, sexism, and classism" (Reddie 84). As a student in England, Gladwell was told by a White Briton that "colour is class" (134). Although the Gladwells and the Nations are both middle class, there is still a class disparity based on race. Womanist theory is "valuable when studying spirituality, for it gives Black women meaning to life and their existence" (Heath 161). The reaction of Graham's family to their engagement is the catalyst to awakening Gladwell's womanist theological consciousness, but it is the continued battle for personhood in England that provides the fertile ground for "a spirituality that stands as a protest against the demeaning status quo, one that seeks justice in the midst of evil...and freedom as a counterbalance to oppression" (Heath 161). Thus, Gladwell's experiences with racism, sexism, and classism expand her isolated meditations to include her role in biased familial and social systems.

After months of debate, Gladwell and Graham were engaged despite his parents' misgivings; she returned to Jamaica for eighteen months; and, two weeks after she arrived in London, they married with his family present. Gladwell describes their wedding as "happy" and everyone who attended "remembered the spirit of happiness and remarked on it afterwards" (151). Her joy at finding and marrying Graham was slightly marred by adjusting to a Westernised, White housewife narrative while also experiencing immigrant life. For the first time since she was twelve years old, Gladwell lived outside of an institution and with the responsibility of a husband. Gladwell struggled with her domestic duties such as cooking and cleaning; the latter she viewed as repetitive drudgery and she lacked the skill and training to execute the former. While White European and American housewives were, perhaps,

acclimatised to accept this script, middle class Afro- and Indo-Caribbean women were socialised to balance home and work with the expectation that there would be ‘help’ at home. Writer Lakshmi Persaud often addresses this Caribbean social norm, but the topic is glaring in her novel *Daughters of Empire* (2012) in which Amira Vidhur migrates to England, following her husband Santosh and his career. In England, Amira finds the “domestic environment...new and challenging” without “the home help she was used to in Trinidad” (Persaud 16). Gladwell observes that “menial tasks” such as “washing the front steps” were “not a picture of [herself she] liked at all” because at “home, the maids always did this sort of job” (152). Amira is in a similar situation, becoming a fulltime housewife and mother after a career as a teacher; she finds her life “[r]epetitive, dull” and “she longed for escape” (Persaud 34). It is interesting that Gladwell would mention the repetitive and uninteresting nature of her life as a housewife given the historical timeframe. Western women in the 1950s were still a decade away from the social and familial impacts of second-wave feminism; socially, it was not yet acceptable for women to express annoyance with housework and childrearing. This bold, honest admission is in keeping with the Caribbean female narrative but completely different from the typical Western female narrative.

Climate was also an issue for Gladwell. Although Gladwell spent a few years away from Jamaica and her goal was to live in England, she found “the damp English day...repelling” and that “the habitual dullness of a London day clouds and depresses” the “spirit” (152). She had to “learn not to look” to cope with the weather (152). Gladwell refers to their first flat in Highgate as “an imprisonment” (152). Her view from the windows was comprised of a “small sky bordered by misted chimney-tops” and she walked “the solid streets lined with terraced houses, as limiting as prison walls” (152). Such gloomy surroundings were a sharp contrast to her

parents' home in Harewood or even the bustle of student housing. In addition, marriage isolated Gladwell; for years, she lived in a school setting and was rarely alone, but when she married, she was left alone all day while Graham worked. Gladwell observes that their "neighbours gave their lives to the god of Routine and ignored their fellow-men under the virtuous excuse of minding their own business" (153). Her contact with them was non-existent and she had no one to talk to other than Graham in the evenings. In addition to isolation, Gladwell was not using her intellect. The time she spent working in Jamaica at University College offered her a life of "gracious leisure, social gatherings and entertainments with music and dancing, banter and gaiety" in addition to the intellectual stimulation of her job (154). As a married woman, she had "no stimulating life, no vigorous challenge to draw [her] out of [herself], no exercising ideas" (154). She went from being a student and postgrad actively engaged in scholarship and with her colleagues to a housewife whose main concerns were bargaining with the butcher and cleaning a small, cold flat.

While Gladwell and Graham sincerely loved each other, their relationship lacked community and family support. Sociologist Diane H. Felmlee found that "[f]avorable reactions on the part of significant others, such as friends or relatives, are likely to strengthen the bonds of a couple" (1261). Couples will likely face both internal and external strains, but support from friends and family helps to stabilise relationships (Felmlee 1261). Graham and Gladwell's social life was relegated to Sunday visits to church; Graham's life on the university campus; and an extended family life that was no better than at home. She writes that in time, her "parents-in-law began to learn to accept [their] marriage" (153). This description lacks warmth, suggesting that Gladwell's in-laws did not accept her as their daughter-in-law but tolerated her as Graham's Black wife. Even Gladwell acknowledges that when the family came together, they "battled with

the sense of strain and remembered pain” (153). This lack of support does nothing to damage their relationship; the explanation for the strengthening of their marriage over time may be the “Romeo and Juliet effect” (Driscoll, Davis, and Lipetz 1972 quoted in Felmlee 1263). Felmlee notes that external resistance to a relationship “may lead a couple to become more committed and involved, rather than less so” (1263). While social support and encouragement of the relationship is needed, it is not always required. In time, Gladwell reports a slight thawing in the relationship; the parents and children “grew together in acceptance and affection” brought on by short periods spent together and worshiping with Graham’s parents (153).

Spirituality and faith played important roles in the marriage, but, while they helped to unify the couple, there were issues caused by Gladwell and Graham’s differences. Gladwell notes that while she believed that the “weekly outing to church should have brought relief from the hardness and drudgery of the week...it added to [her] unhappiness,” and much of this dissatisfaction involved the church they joined (153). They initially joined the Brethren Assembly<sup>20</sup> because that was Graham’s childhood church, but Gladwell was uncomfortable in the services because the “form of worship was quite unlike what [she] was used to” (153). Gladwell states that at Brethren Assembly meetings, there was no minister, no formal structure to their services, and there was a sexist overtone to the meetings as only men participated while women were expected to remain silent (153-54). Black theology theorist Anthony G. Reddie believes that belonging “to British society and that of the church, for a black person, necessitates a denial of one’s self” (13). Not only did Gladwell balk at the disorganised services which were so unlike the structured Anglican services from her childhood, but she “found this ban on [her]

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<sup>20</sup> The Brethren Movement is a conservative, nonconformist, Protestant, evangelical Christian movement with Anglican origins that began in Ireland in the late 1820s. For more information, see H.A. Ironside’s *A Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement* (1985) or [brethrenhistory.org](http://brethrenhistory.org).

sex oppressive” and was unable to submerge her needs to be an active participant in church services (154). The Brethren Assembly offered Gladwell few opportunities to participate in activities. She attended a women’s meeting but noticed that the women attended “to be soothed and rested, not stirred and challenged to activity”; she stopped attending (154). Her dreary surroundings in combination with her chilled extended familial relationships, lack of mental stimulation, and misogyny in church services led Gladwell to associate her married life in that first year with the “chill drabness” of John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678), which she read as a child.

Despite the intellectual, social, and familial privations of her early married life, Gladwell soon had an event to look forward to—the arrival of her first child. She believes that her pregnancy “came too quickly and made an already bewildering complex of difficulties almost overwhelming” (155). As Gladwell’s pregnancy progresses, the leisurely life of a middle-class, Black Caribbean becomes clearer. While she mentioned earlier that she could neither clean nor cook, during her pregnancy she notes that before she led a “protected and leisured childhood at Harewood” and a “hedged and ordered life at St Hilary’s” (155). In short, her early life did not prepare her for this new challenge. In addition, like many Black immigrant women caught in the NHS web during 1950s and 1960s, Gladwell found that even these private changes to her body on public display. Gladwell’s hospital was a teaching institution; she enjoyed the antenatal classes; the company of other expectant mothers; and the medical staff prevented her from going into premature labour. However, she “knew the indignities and humiliations of being a patient in a teaching hospital” in which “medical students used [her] exposed body as an object lesson” (155). In one of these lessons, Gladwell overheard the instructor stating that her issues were the “logical outcome of malnutrition...expected in someone from an underdeveloped country,”

propagating the stereotype of the starving immigrant (155). At the end of Gladwell's pregnancy, like most new mothers she doubted her ability to care for baby Graham alone, exacerbated by her separation from Daisy. Gladwell felt like she needed her mother more now than she did as a new St Hilary's student her first time away from home (156). In addition, her in-laws were not pleased with the birth of the new baby perhaps because it "forced on them the reality of [Gladwell and Graham's] union which still seemed to them unnatural" (156). Graham's parents "seemed to feel no joy" at the birth of the baby, which not only hurt Gladwell deeply but reinforced that idea that they would not support her in caring for the baby (156). She was alone except for Graham. Gladwell hints at, but never fully discloses, the impact of race on her growing family. With the birth of her first child, Gladwell is forced to accept the fact that to her in-laws she will always be 'Black'—not a treasured family member—and that this status extends to her child. Although she "longed for a baby," the realisation that they would never be completely accepted by the Gladwells must have been painful (155).

Motherhood increased Gladwell's isolation and raised feelings of entrapment as well. The sight of a mother and her children walking with a pram made Gladwell feel trapped; she "was a mother, and the realization did not bring a sense of joyful fulfilment but of unending bondage" that would increase with the birth of each new child and continue until her death (157). The loneliness and isolation of motherhood were social norms in the post-WWII years in countries like England and the US where the goal was to return to 'traditional' family values with a stay-at-home mother and working father. For immigrant mothers, this paradigm was not always visible as many of these women worked, which also meant that parenting had to be two-parent rather than traditional mothering. Wendy Webster notes that "[p]rofessional women, including many feminists, emphasized their own need for a life that was 'more than family', resisting an

exclusively relational identity as wives and mothers (131). Second-wave feminists challenged these ‘traditional’ family values as they often left many women feeling trapped by maternity as Gladwell did. One such text is the late Buchi Emecheta’s (1944-2017) *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) in which Nnu Ego, a Nigerian woman living in a traditional society, longs to conceive a child only to come to the realisation that motherhood is a cherished state and an overwhelming responsibility. Despite Gladwell’s doubts, inexperience, and isolation from family and others, she was not alone. Graham was an engaged parent; he was both willing to and capable of helping with daily childcare tasks. Soon, Gladwell had outside help when her health visitor found her a home helper to support her with childcare and household tasks.

As both Gladwell and Graham were intellectuals, it was only a matter of time before they started exchanging ideas and discussing their subjects—psychology for Gladwell and mathematics for Graham. These discussions opened a new world of ideas to Gladwell, and she considered it the informal continuation of her education. However, Gladwell notes that the “absorption and seriousness with which [they] began [their] exchange gave way to a cheerful tolerance” (159). While their discussions took on a less serious tone, Gladwell did begin to read and edit Graham’s papers for publication, familiarising herself with the terminology of mathematics. Graham came to rely on Gladwell’s feedback and implement the suggested changes in his articles, and Gladwell’s proficiency at editing led to an opportunity to once again immerse herself in the world of ideas. Graham was asked to rewrite a book originally written in Korean, and he recommended Gladwell for the position. This task took her three years, but “this piece of work gave [her] the experience and confidence to begin writing as a part-time occupation” (160). The job also helped Gladwell to climb “out of [her] slough of domesticity” (160). In some ways, her first writing job allowed Gladwell to admit to herself that she did not

find domestic life entirely fulfilling. Gladwell “longed to be out in the world again, the world of people and demanding mental work,” yet she questioned her need, guiltily believing that perhaps she “fell short of the spirit of a true Christian” because she wanted more out of life (161).

Although she forced herself to once again take up the task of housework to somehow prove her Christian humility and ease her guilt, she realises that there is a gendered bias to her feelings. Guilt about not wanting to be a housewife is a woman’s problem “not a man’s problem” (161). She observes that no “Christian men...trained to be doctors, would adjust contentedly to the role of ambulance driver”; therefore, why should Gladwell shelve her own dissatisfactions simply because she is a wife and mother (161)? She locates few women willing to admit they feel this way; often, during this time in her life, she faced reproach from other women who felt she should be satisfied. Gladwell concluded “that the reproving voice of [her] Christian sisters was not the voice of God” (161). Many years later, she finally found a “group of English housewives who shared [her] problems”—women who admitted that they were not completely satisfied being housewives—and this provided a “balm to [her] spirit” (161).

Despite Graham’s loyalty demonstrated by standing up to his parents to marry her, Gladwell “was still plagued by lack of confidence and self-respect because of [her] colour”—particularly in social situations in which Graham either had to acknowledge or ignore her (162). Race continued to be an issue, threatening to divide the couple. Feelings of inadequacy are, unfortunately, part of the Caribbean immigrant experience in Britain given the country’s oftentimes shameful treatment of non-Whites<sup>21</sup> and common in interracial relationships. Psychologist Jon K. Mills et al’s research on interracial relationships found that of the White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian students surveyed, “Whites indicated a higher degree of negativity

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<sup>21</sup> For more information, see Moore’s “Introduction” to *Racism and Black Resistance* (1975) and Gilroy’s *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (1987).

and prejudicial attitudes toward those of other races than Blacks,” which is linked to Blacks being a population minority in the US (and UK) and being “forced to interact and associate with a dominant White society” in many situations (351). White Americans and Britons—particularly in the 1950s and 1960s—were not ‘forced’ to interact with minorities; therefore, they could reject social and personal situations in which they would have to interact with minorities.

Gladwell discussed the attitude of Graham’s family toward her in detail as well as social interactions that left her on alert; however, given Graham’s treatment of Gladwell, her mild suspicion of him eventually rejecting her was unfounded. He never failed to acknowledge her as his wife and “incurred the humiliations of [her] colour, but...remained true” to her, the marriage, and their family (162). One of the worst of these situations took place when Graham Jr. was about six months old. Graham and Gladwell’s application to live in a portion of a privately-owned Georgian house was accepted, but when they arrived to move in, the landlady was shocked to see a “coloured person, a Jamaican, in her house” (162-63). Housing for non-White immigrants was difficult to secure; it was not unusual for Black Caribbean immigrants in post-WWII England to encounter overt racism when looking for housing. Cecil Holmes remembers signs reading “Black—Niggers not wanted here” when looking for a room in *Windrush*-era London (Phillips and Phillips 89). The next day when the landlady evicted them, Graham could have expressed frustration at Gladwell but he simply called his father to come and get the family, and they lived with Graham’s parents for six weeks until they found other accommodations. Gladwell’s feelings were hurt by this woman’s bold prejudice that left her family homeless; she eventually became ill. Again, Gladwell turns her attention to God, asking why she, “the wounded representative of the negro race in [their] struggle to be accounted free and equal with the dominating whites,” was being repeatedly tested (163). Gladwell again demonstrates that racism

can prompt her to turn to God; in an impossible situation, only God can comfort her. In time, she realises that “as God was concerned,” she and the racist landlady were guilty of being “children of [their] backgrounds, caught in the deceitfulness of false values” (163). Both Gladwell and this landlady, in their own way, are acting out scripts based on race, gender, ethnicity, and circumstance. Gladwell realises that “while [she] was victim for one moment, the next [she] was [herself] the offender” (164). Despite Gladwell’s realisation that she too was at fault, the constant, everyday battles in England based on her race and gender combined with her overbearing maternity and the strains of maintaining an interracial marriage in a country with strong racial biases took their toll on Gladwell. Her need to be “constantly on the alert” made her very thin, led to a recurring bout of “intestinal trouble,” and “repeated attacks of tonsillitis,” so that when Graham was offered a lecture position at University College in Jamaica for two years, Gladwell was thrilled to go home (165).

Gladwell refers to the two years her family spent in Jamaica as being filled with “restoring features” such as “warm sunshine, household help, the nearness, once again, of close relatives and long-known friends” (170). In Jamaica, Gladwell, for the first time since her marriage, was neither alone nor isolated. Perhaps the biggest relief was Gladwell’s realisation that racism would not be ubiquitous in Jamaica as it was in England. With her sister and mother nearby, Gladwell felt that her “burden of continuous responsibility and vigilance was lifted for a little” and that she was not shifting her burdens to anyone by allowing herself to relax because of the availability of help around the house (165). Gladwell could relax in Jamaica in a way that she could not in England.

During their first year in Jamaica, Gladwell and Graham had another son, Geoffrey, and she describes this birthing experience in more pleasant terms than Graham Junior’s birth.

Gladwell was neither ill nor hospitalised during this pregnancy. She did not deliver in a teaching hospital so her body was not on display, and the Jamaican hospital was more aesthetically appealing than the English hospital as the rooms were filled with sunlight. Finally, Gladwell was shown more kindness and received more support at home in Jamaica after Geoffrey's birth than she experienced with Graham Junior. Her childhood friends visited, her family was present, and everyone contributed to help Gladwell acclimatise to mothering two babies. The family also lived in houses with yards instead of in small flats, which not only provided them with more room but probably also allowed Gladwell to feel less like a large animal trapped in a very small cage. In addition, Gladwell was given the opportunity to lecture students at the University Health Centre on "the social background of Jamaica," which allowed her to do what she enjoyed and utilise her training (170). With her family cared for, less drudgery of household chores placed on Gladwell, and with the opportunity to exercise her intellect, Gladwell's two years in Jamaica served as the curative needed to allow her to re-immense herself in the 'real world'—her former life in England.

By May 1962, the family was ready to return to England but took a detour through the US for three months where Graham worked at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Gladwell was anxious about going to America, and, in the early 1960s, this anxiety was justified. She "feared more humiliating experiences because of discrimination, for already [they] had been advised to live on one side of the river in Boston...because [she] was Jamaican" (171). Racial unrest and police brutality were legitimate concerns then for people of colour in the US, and Gladwell and Graham's marriage was illegal and a punishable offense in many states. Gladwell observes that it "was trying enough to leave home again to return to the place of hardness from which [she] had escaped for a while; now, [they] were going out with two small children, one

still a baby” (171). Gladwell was probably also concerned with resuming the responsibilities of wife and mother; in addition, in those three months she would not exercise her intellect as much if at all. With these cares weighing on her, Gladwell could think only of pouring “out [her] trouble to God and waiting for an answer, which came in the form of a verse from the Book of Isaiah:

For you shall go out in joy, and be lead forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands (171).

Again, Gladwell turns to God when life seems impossible, feeling that “God kept his promise in detail,” as the family began on their journey (171). The airplane trip was smooth and the flight attendants helpful. Yet, on arrival in the Boston airport, Gladwell and Graham, arms filled with babies and luggage, found themselves “once more among the over-civilized” as one woman passed ahead of Gladwell and let a door swing back in her face (172). Graham fared no better attempting to push some pieces of luggage with his foot as he carried a child and other pieces. These incidents were, luckily, isolated and Gladwell notes that they “met no unpleasant experiences because of [her] colour”; in fact, they were welcomed by a White American couple who were members of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) and very kind to them, perhaps to overcompensate because of Gladwell’s race (172). Daisy also came to visit them in Boston for six weeks, which gave Gladwell more time with her mother before returning to England and gave Gladwell and Graham some time alone knowing that the boys were well cared for by their grandmother. In September 1962, the Queen Mary docked at Southampton with the Gladwell family on board. Gladwell found that after two years away, some things remained the same, like the English rain, while others changed.

While living with her in-laws in Kent for six weeks, Gladwell often wondered why she returned to England. The country was still plagued by xenophobia and non-White foreigners were still unwelcomed. She mentions that had she “been free to please [herself], to secure [her] own comfort and happiness [she] would certainly not have returned” (174). Gladwell was on constant alert “for signs of prejudice against [her]” and this built-up tension, which contributed to her illness two years before, could certainly do so again (175). Now, the stakes were higher for Gladwell’s family; she had two small children to consider and could not afford to be constantly tense around them. Graham found the family a home near Southampton; they joined the Above Bar Church<sup>22</sup> in Southampton. Gladwell felt at home there and at the university where one of Graham’s colleagues included them in his social gatherings. Still, Gladwell struggled with not being at home in Jamaica as she missed the mountains and sunlight of her “own country” (175). Perhaps this desire for her “own country” is the first time in the entire narrative that Gladwell expresses this desire. Initially, wanting to go to England, by the time Gladwell marries and has children, she begins to realise that her dream is not as she imagined. Within a year of returning to England, Gladwell was pregnant again and they welcomed Malcolm in 1963. In the winter during her pregnancy, Gladwell struggled again with depression, which was probably the result of her physical illness, the cold and gloom outside, and feeling trapped by household duties. After winter, her spirits lifted although there is no mention of Gladwell calling on God to dispel this bout of depression.

Despite the comfort and security of her family, Gladwell again faces what is perhaps a typical Black experience—that of being called “Nigger” (178). Legal scholar Randall Kennedy’s research on the use of this slur, focusing on African American celebrities, suggests that in

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<sup>22</sup> The Above Bar Church is an evangelical church founded in 1876 by Henry Samuel Earl. It is affiliated with the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches. For more information, see the Church’s website at [abovebarchurch.org.uk/](http://abovebarchurch.org.uk/).

settings where Blacks represent a population minority and are viewed as Other or alien, the use of the term is ubiquitous. Graham just left the house with Graham Junior and Geoffrey; Gladwell waved from the door. Suddenly, a boy went by on a bicycle yelling that most painful of racial slurs at her. Gladwell, like so many people of colour before her, experiences a range of emotions. She is angry at letting her guard down and allowing herself to feel safe in her neighbourhood. She is desperate and calls on God to “let [her] reprove him” (179). In the end, Gladwell decides to yield to God, bringing her immigrant narrative full circle. In the beginning, she struggles with the idea and act of yielding to God—fearful of letting Him have too much control over her life while also wanting to serve Him. Gladwell finds, after this painful interaction, that she is like the trees outside of her home near Southampton. In the winter, they are skeletal “jerking ungracefully in the wind, like old people bearing sorrow without sadness” (180). Like those trees she renews, sprouting buds and leaves in the spring despite the harsh winter. Throughout her narrative, Gladwell demonstrates how Caribbean female immigrants use faith to survive and thrive in often unwelcoming environments. Faith and spirituality are tools used to overcome the loneliness, isolation, and depression caused by immigrant life.

Joyce Gladwell’s narrative has much in common with other Caribbean female migrant narratives. These texts address gendered migration, race, nationality, and, ultimately, difference. Gladwell’s discussion of her quest for spirituality is ground-breaking because this topic is usually deeply personal and not included in Caribbean female migrant narratives as a central theme. Gladwell’s honesty about her struggles, while relatively common in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, were quite uncommon in 1969 when the text was published. Black women were largely silent on this topic because questioning and challenging God is probably less acceptable among Black Christians than other groups. *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) depicts some element of Black religious

consciousness; Lena slaps her adult daughter Beneatha for rejecting belief in God, demonstrating why there is reticence among the Black Christians to challenge the existence of God.

When reading Gladwell's migrant narrative, the question of purpose arises. Gladwell does not seem particularly concerned with audience although the narrative could appeal to several. Her discussion of faith might appeal to the religious readers while her honesty about depression might draw the attention of mental health scholars. However, it is Gladwell's use of spirituality to address racism that is most interesting. Gladwell's narrative is written as though she was uncomfortable with her own colourism and struck by British racism. What is intriguing about Gladwell's behaviour is the impact of racial injustice on her relationship with God. In the Caribbean as an adult, Gladwell does not turn to God as much as she does in England where incidents of racial discrimination motivate her to pray. Yet, she still manages to confront her bias, which is demonstrated by her retrospective examination of her behaviour after the family is evicted by the racist landlady. Also, Gladwell's discussion of Cookie's complexion, cult-religious leanings, and sincerity show Gladwell evolving—facing her biased beliefs and providing an analysis of their development. Gladwell's narrative is a complex examination of race, gender, and faith during a migration. Like Mary Prince's and Mary Seacole's narrative, Gladwell's autobiography gives backchat—questioning the roots of her biases and challenging other middle-class Caribbeans like herself and Britons like those she encountered to do the same.

**CHAPTER III:**

**THE NOVELTY OF GIVING BACKCHAT:  
THE CARIBBEAN ROOTS OF BLACK BRITISH LITERATURE**

## The Burden of Insouciance in Jean Rhys' *Voyage in the Dark*

I had a complete conviction that I was a useless person  
from *Smile Please* 121

The fiction of Dominican writer Jean Rhys, an immigrant living in England in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, provides some insight into the lives of Caribbean immigrants when those going 'home' to England were largely Caucasians with family ties to the country. Many of these immigrants found that while they had an attachment to Britain in general as colonised subjects and England specifically by a long and complex history of cultural exchanges and descent, there was still a great divide between the newcomers and Britons fuelled by misinformation and disparities between British life in the UK and Caribbean. Anglo-Caribbean immigrants learned that while they were British, there was also some distinctly Caribbean factor about them as well; essentially, their 'West Indian-ness' betrayed them.

Living in Britain must have been particularly troubling for White Caribbean immigrants. Literary theorist and scholar Homi K. Bhabha refers to "the ambivalent world of the 'not quite/not white,' on the margins of metropolitan desire," which can be interpreted in relation to White Caribbean immigrants in Britain in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, pointing to their desire and expectations of inclusion into all that the metropolis represented to the White colonial, such as power, status, and privilege (131). However, they were not entirely incorporated into the British metropole, living in but not fully belonging to it. White Caribbean immigrants left home countries in which they exercised a considerable amount of economic and social power—their version of White privilege—for Britain where they found themselves not at the bottom but certainly nowhere near the top of social and economic structures. The tepid reception of the White West Indian in England is like Jean Rhys' introduction to life abroad.

In August 1907, a 16-year-old White Dominican named Gwen Williams, who became a chorus girl named Ella or Emma Gray and finally settled on an author named Jean Rhys, landed in Southampton (Angier 19; Rhys *Smile* 97). She was disappointed with her first view of Southampton and her “heart sank” when she looked out of the porthole of the “ocean boat” that carried her and her father’s sister, Aunt Clarice, from Bridgetown, Barbados where they travelled to meet the ship (*Smile* 93). This was to be the first of many disappointments Rhys would face as a White West Indian immigrant in England. Rhys biographer Diana Athill states that Rhys toyed with the idea of writing her autobiography in the years before her death in 1979 (5). However, autobiography was an unfamiliar genre and her preference was for the novel (Athill 5). Consequently, in addition to her unfinished autobiography *Smile Please* (1979), Rhys left behind several novels and short stories that provide some glimpses into her life. Yet, Rhys’ only piece of fiction that records many events marking her first years in England is her novel *Voyage in the Dark* (1934).

*Voyage* chronicles the rather tumultuous existence of Anna Morgan, a 19-year-old White West Indian who moves to England and finds herself at odds with her Mother Country’s ‘alien’ culture. Anna is a young woman unable to carve out a life worth living for herself in England because she is not English and cannot assimilate into the culture. The idea of a ‘British’ character who is incapable of assimilating into English society challenges the suggestion that the most significant element of British identity is racial affiliation. While Rhys’ character is White, her racial affiliation with the population majority does not mean that she is a Briton; there is some untenable element of Anna’s personality that separates her from actual Britons. Anna is a literary character that also possesses a crippling burden of insouciance—an intangible weight draining her of the will to work and struggle to create a new life for herself as most immigrants do.

Through Anna, Rhys creates an immigrant character who is only marginally capable or willing to do the needful to survive.

Anna has much in common with another adolescent protagonist but from American modern literature: Holden Caulfield of J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1945). Like Holden, Anna wanders aimlessly through life without a definable purpose or goal; however, there is a major stylistic difference between the two characters. Whereas Holden thinks too much, Anna seems not to think at all. Anna stumbles through life, which H. Adlai Murdoch believes is a direct result of the ambiguity of her heritage as a Creole and its resulting subjectivity, meaning that Anna cannot abandon her White West Indian privilege—the lynchpin of her childhood existence. In addition, as a Creole Anna belongs to a social group that occupies a liminal space—they are between the Empire and its subjects. As such, White Caribbean Creoles seem to belong neither in one society nor the other. In this respect, Anna is like Rhys' other popular White Caribbean protagonist Antoinette Cosway; they long “to belong to opposing communities and cultures” but “must confront the fact that indeed, they fully belong to neither” (Murdoch 257). Rhys, like Anna on some level, yearns to fit into British society because she is a member of the planter class and has a familial connection to England. Yet, as a Caribbean Creole she also rejects British society because of her West Indian identity. Murdoch states that the “fundamental conundrum of Caribbean creoleness” is that regardless of ethnic origin or affiliation, the Caribbean Creole “is excluded from both the metropolitan and the colonial axes despite her incontrovertible participation in both” (263). The Caribbean Creole exists firmly on the margins of the European-born Anglo Self. While she may share a racial history with the European, she is never fully accepted as a European because she comes from a place is geographically as well as culturally distanced from Europe. Thus Anna, and Anglo-Caribbeans in Europe like Rhys, could

be described as standing “in a void between the island she left behind, and the island where she cannot belong” (Casey 97).

Literary theorist Urmila Seshagiri writes that with *Voyage*, Rhys introduces the criteria of the post-colonial novel (500). This may be overstatement on Seshagiri’s part, but perhaps, Seshagiri is correct in one respect. *Voyage* is the first of its kind; it is the novel that introduces world literature audiences to a Caribbean character who was born into the planter class but feels a connection to the former slaves: an Anglo-Caribbean woman with a desire to be Black without understanding the implications or problematic nature of her desire. *Voyage* is the story of approximately six months in Anna’s life and takes place in England between 1913 and 1914, and the novel’s events parallel Rhys’ own first years in England. Literary theorist Judith Moore suggests that the novel describes images that seem shocking and sensational “to any reader who identifies England in the early thirties” (25). By stating that the novel is set in the 1930s, Moore confuses the original publication date in 1934, with its historical setting, which is around the time that the novel was originally written. In *Smile*, Rhys states that the notebooks she filled in 1914 after the break-up of her first pseudo-romantic relationship “were the foundation for *Voyage in the Dark*” (156). There are some events in the novel that mirror events Rhys describes in her autobiography, but it is Rhys’ avoidance of WWI that helps to place *Voyage* in the years before the war.

The novel never addresses WWI, which suggests that the events of the novel could have occurred before the war began in July of that year or that Rhys simply chose not to have Anna’s story overshadowed by the war when she rewrote the notebooks as a novel in the 1930s. However, the break-up that caused Rhys to write in the notebooks ended in 1913—months before WWI began as Angier states that it was at “the beginning of 1914” in an area of “Chelsea

called World's End" when Rhys bought the exercise books in which she would write the notes for *Voyage* (39). WWI did not officially begin until 28 July 1914. Another possibility for not mentioning the war involves Rhys' own recollections. She writes, "When I think back to the 1914 war my memory seems disconnected and vague" (Rhys *Smile* 132). Rhys' description of her first indication that the war was a real event supports her statement and demonstrates Rhys' own carelessness. Around this time, Rhys became a founding member of a nightclub, the Crabtree. She states, "the first time it truly dawned on me that we were at war was when I went to the Crabtree one night and found a notice posted up: CLOSED FOR THE DURATION" (Rhys *Smile* 133). Rhys' confirms that *Voyage* was written in 1914 and was originally a set of recollections of her relationship with an older lover named Lancelot Grey Hugh Smith (1870-1941), who financially supported her, as Ella Gray, like the character Walter Jeffries supports Anna in *Voyage*.

Anna is an Anglo-Caribbean—"the fifth generation born out there, on [her] mother's side" (Rhys *Voyage* 45). She is the only child of a Scottish doctor and a Dominican Creole descended from planters—an ancestral profile like Rhys'. While Rhys reveals that Anna's father died before the novel begins and she was left in the care of her English stepmother Hester, no information is given about Anna's mother other than her maiden name was Costerus and that her family owned Constance Estate, a working plantation. The family also owned slaves before emancipation, and Anna describes seeing the plantation's old slave records as a child. This information provides one of the novel's more thought-provoking moments because, by revealing her family's historical relationship with Caribbean Blacks, Anna exposes the Caribbean's historical, social, and racial complexities. Despite the gravity of this moment, Anna conveys the

information in such a straightforward manner that she gives the impression that she simply does not care.

Racial affiliation can be quite ambiguous in the Caribbean given the incidents of intermarriage and procreation between the various racial groups. However, the prevalence of intermingling can lead to misguided assumptions. For example, Hester suggests that Anna's mother was "coloured" simply because she was born in the Caribbean and because Anna is comfortable around Blacks (Rhys *Voyage* 56). Anna must correct Hester's assumptions by stating that "she wasn't" Black in one of the few examples of mental effort Anna performs (Rhys *Voyage* 56). Perhaps Rhys too was subjected to 'blackening' as a West Indian in early 20<sup>th</sup> century England. In this brief scene, Rhys introduces an issue that remains relevant in the contemporary Caribbean among White Caribbeans—that of maintaining some sense of racial identity in a society in which miscegenation is the norm. There are other literary examples of racial ambiguity, such as Nella Larson's *Passing* (1929) and *Plum Bun* (1929) by Jessie Redman Fauset, both from the Harlem Renaissance and contemporaneous to *Voyage*. Elizabeth Nunez gives an example of the ambiguity of race in the Caribbean in her novel *Bruised Hibiscus* (2000) in which Rosa, the daughter of a White landowner, finds out in adulthood that she is the product of a relationship between her White mother and an Afro-Trinidadian man. Although Rosa appears White, she is not. Rhys, like Nunez decades later, is showing that race in the Caribbean is complicated.

At the beginning of *Voyage*, Anna is a chorus girl on hiatus from a show, living in a rooming house with her English friend Maudie, another chorus girl. As Ella Gray, Rhys secured her first job as a chorus girl in "a musical comedy called *Our Miss Gibbs* in 1909" (*Smile* 105). Somewhat innocent and completely lost, Anna initially avoids becoming the classic *demimonde*

by working to support herself but soon falls into that trap, becoming the lover of a man old enough to be her father. Literary critic Elgin W. Mellown notes that Anna's "love affair with Walter Jeffries springs from an adolescent desire to find that warmth and security which she knew in childhood in the game of sexual love with a partner old enough to be her father" (463). Anna, like many of Rhys' heroines, cannot escape fate as her "happiness is always followed by sadness, and her last state is always worse than her first" (Mellown 463). Although Anna has a sexual relationship with Walter, she does not seem even remotely attracted to or attached to him, so their relationship takes on the tone of a business arrangement. While Walter is fond of Anna, he is neither affectionate nor loving; he often teases her, mocking the way she speaks, and is amused by what he perceives as her innocence and youthful attitude. There are some possible explanations for Anna's connection to Walter that may be rooted in an unresolved relationship from Rhys' childhood. Rhys writes in *Smile*, "I can only remember my father in little things" (72). Throughout the chapter titled "My Father," there is some detachment from her father, "a man of middle height" who was "always...kind and gentle" (*Smile* 68 and 72). Despite her cloudy memories of her father, Rhys expresses some affection from her father, but in the chapter of *Smile* dedicated to him, there seems to be a longing for his attention. Perhaps Walter's relationship with Anna provides the paternal attention Rhys feels she did not receive.

Another possibility exists for Anna's relationship with an older man. Literary theorist Maren Linett believes that Anna "survived an unnarrated, largely inaccessible sexual trauma" and diagnoses many of Rhys' characters, such as Anna, with PTSD (440 and 437). In *Smile*, Rhys discloses that she "can abstract [herself] from [her] body" (118). This is a description of dissociation, which provides victims of abuse with a way of separating themselves from the traumatic event. While Anna remains completely silent on the topic of sexual abuse and Rhys

provides little to no information in *Smile*, in her short story “Good-bye Marcus, Good-bye Rose” (1976), Rhys is more forthcoming. The protagonist, 12-year-old Phoebe, is molested by an older family acquaintance, who initiates the abuse in the Botanical Gardens perhaps in Roseau<sup>23</sup>. Phoebe describes the incident: “His hand, which had been lying quietly by his side, darted towards her, dived inside her blouse and clamped itself around one very small breast” (Rhys “Good-bye Marcus” 26). Like most sexual abuse victims, Phoebe blames herself for continuing to take walks with her abuser, for not trying to stop him from talking to her about sexual matters, and for not being “a good girl...but a wicked one” (Rhys “Good-bye Marcus” 29).

In this story, Phoebe could be Rhys’ mouthpiece, exposing a painful, embarrassing event. In addition to Phoebe’s internal struggle, she is also concerned with her family and society. Suspicion is cast on the child victim, but this response meets Phoebe’s expectations as she tells herself immediately after the act that “no one would believe exactly how it had happened, and whether they believed her or not she would be blamed” (Rhys “Good-bye Marcus” 27). In retrospect and after her years in Europe, perhaps Rhys came to realise that every act committed by women and girls is suspect in patriarchal societies. Thus, by the time she creates Antoinette Cosway, all that is left for this character is the refuge of madness, allowing her to escape her controlling husband and his warped ideas about her, his childlike bride.

Anna, like Phoebe, could be reliving her childhood sexual trauma in her sexual relationship with Walter. Her dissociation and detachment is typical of an abuse survivor but unusual given the economic need on which the relationship is based. Yet, Phoebe at the end of “Good-bye Marcus” reveals that she will adopt a pattern of carelessness when she states, “she felt very wise, very grown-up, she could forget these childish worries” (Rhys 30). Phoebe’s

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<sup>23</sup> The Botanical Gardens in Roseau, Dominica was planted in 1890, the year of Rhys’ birth, so there is a possibility that these events are based on fact.

initial worries involved exposure as a “wicked” girl, but with this new experience and her abuser’s departure, she can say “good-bye Marcus. Good-bye Rose,” two of the names she picked for her future children, and embrace the “prospect before her,” which “might be difficult” but “was far more exciting” (Rhys “Good-bye Marcus” 30). While “Good-bye Marcus” was published in 1976, there is no way to definitively state when it was written. Perhaps this story was Rhys’ way of editing literary history—of making careless female characters like Anna seem more logical by devising a pattern of abuse and residual trauma to explain their behaviour. It is also possible that Rhys was finally allowing herself a small, six-page safe space to divulge her own experience with abuse and trauma. What is clear is that Anna, at some point, was hurt and this pain involved sex and a father or father figure. Because of this abuse, she is almost destined to fall into a cycle of trading sex for comfort and security.

Eventually, Anna’s affair transforms her into a reproduction—a tiresome duplication of the *demimonde*, that literary trope of the hapless young woman who embraces prostitution as a last resort to survive. Anna is not wealthy, well-educated, or talented, and theorist Nancy Casey suggests that she has few options but to “fall back on her appearance” (100). The issue with Casey’s contention is that at no point in the novel is Anna described as particularly attractive. Rhys’ use of the *demimonde* trope in *Voyage* is slightly different from the usual depiction of the kept woman. Whereas the typical literary *demimonde* character such as Marguerite Gautier, protagonist from *The Lady of the Camellias* (1848)6v, has no option but to resort to prostitution, Anna can avoid taking this path because she has choices. Despite Casey’s contention that Anna has “no fortune, no education, and no special ability to recommend her” necessitating her reliance on her appearance, this is not completely accurate (100). According to Linett, Anna is “helpless”—incapable of fending for herself (438). Casey also contends that helplessness has

been bred into her by her indolent youth in the Caribbean (95). Anna, unlike Maudie and other young women in the same position, has options. She could have continued to work as a chorus girl or taken the education that she received at Hester's expense and gotten more stable or suitable employment. However, Anna merely *falls* into sexual relationships and the pattern of trading sex for comfort, and, eventually, for survival, which she would never have done in Dominica. At one point in the novel, Anna's situation strikes her when she is undressing after a 'date' with Walter. She states, "My God, this is a funny way to live. My God, how did this happen?" (Rhys *Voyage* 35). This question could have been posed by Rhys. Here, Rhys could be allowing Anna to ask a question that troubled her. Rhys, who went to school in England for two years at her parents' expense before her father's death, also had options. Her relationship with Lancelot Smith was, while not entirely romantic, very comfortable and Rhys quickly adapted to relying on him in every part of her life. While Rhys, as Ella Gray, was a working woman when she met Lancelot, it became less of a burden to simply rely on him. Soon, like Anna, she was probably too dependent on this replacement father to fend for herself.

Anna, the Caribbean Creole character who lacks drive and direction and carelessly lives her life, may also be a critique of the planter class and its residual attitudes still present in the pre-independence period extending from the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. For generations, planters and their families benefitted from their privileged position and prepared their children for a life of leisure. This lifestyle is one that prepares young adults to do very little because it relies on social structures set in place centuries before that no longer apply; Anna's lethargic behaviour in England supports this theory. Anna's torpidity ultimately leads to her undoing because in England she was expected to accomplish some goal or at least giving the appearance of doing something with their lives to set them apart from the lazy, helpless colonials that Casey describes

Anna as exemplifying (Casey 99). While Rhys fetishizes Black skin, wanting, symbolically, to don it, she is still a product of the West Indian plantocracy. At home, there were houses staffed with servants, which made life easier but could also create a level of helplessness—particularly among the White descendants of the plantocrats; Rhys shares this pattern of learned helplessness with Anna.

At the beginning of the novel, Anna states, “You look at your hideous underclothes and you think, ‘All right, I’ll do anything for good clothes. Anything—anything for clothes’” (Rhys *Voyage* 22). Her statement seems to suggest that Anna will truly do *anything* for good clothes, even debase herself. There is another possibility. Anna exists from day to day, carelessly wandering aimlessly through her existence because that is all that she has learned to do. There is an “innate weakness in Anna – a lack of will, an absence of energy, a fear of striking out on her own,” which makes her hesitant to attempt to succeed or to even set a goal (Casey 96). As the novel progresses, it becomes clearer that Anna is not so much interested in the acquisition of material items for their value as she is in watching the English women around her acquire them. Anna is imitating their behaviour, struggling to become English or what she believes is English, in England, in the workforce, and in social interactions with her colleagues and lovers. Literary critic Alicia Borinsky writes that because she is an actress, “The part that Anna is trying for is Laurie’s life” (235). Laurie is Anna’s friend and the novel’s actual *demimonde*, who initiates Anna into this lifestyle by introducing her to Walter. Anna desires the comfort of Laurie’s life; for example, the pleasure of a warm bath which Laurie can have at any time. Anna revels in her bath at Laurie’s safe flat, free from the constant harassment of a nosy landlady, demonstrating that she craves comfort and security above all else. Throughout the novel, Anna is primarily concerned with meeting those needs, but she seems uninterested in life in general, which means

she often commits to certain actions without contemplating the consequences. Unlike an Afro-Caribbean counterpart in England who would have to work and find a way to survive, Anna simply lets life carry her along. She is a product of her upbringing, behaving like someone who is destined to rule but is unsure of what to do with that power. The creation of such an insouciant character who is also an immigrant is intriguing as carelessness is antithetical to the striving, female immigrant archetype.

The typical female immigrant archetype is a woman who struggles to survive in a new environment and faces setbacks and challenges throughout this process. This character is usually a woman of colour in a majority White country. She has no extended family, struggling to support her children. If she has a husband, he either leaves her and their children before the story begins or at a critical point in the story, placing her in a precarious financial position. In the 1980s after several generations of post-WWII immigration to Britain, novels such as *In the Ditch* (1974) by late Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta (1944-2017) and Joan Riley's *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987) met the criteria of the female immigrant narrative. The novels falling into this category feature protagonists actively struggling for survival not carelessly allowing life to carry them along. Rhys and her characters have the benefit of race—they at least *look* as though they belong in Britain whereas Emecheta's and Riley's protagonists look like strangers. Therefore, these prototypes and the women whose experiences they reflect are never quite accepted into the host society. The typical female immigrant archetype is both exiled from home and marginalised while away.

Literary theorist Mary Lou Emory refers to Rhys' novels as portraying “marginal women, exiled both culturally and sexually” who “walk the streets, not quite prostitutes, yet living on the edges of respectability, sanity, and dignity” (418). Anna is never quite at home in England or in

the Caribbean, marginalised in both locations. Anna's careless attitude points to Rhys' commentary on race and privilege, and how certain factors help or harm characters who are living in exile from home. Being White Caribbean, landowning family affords Anna privileges at home that do not transfer to England; there is little chance for a White Caribbean woman to take advantage of any racial-kinship opportunities in a country like England when she seems so unlike the residents.

At this point, the question is whether Rhys is judging herself—the White child of privilege who still ends up on society's margins. Rhys' own experiences as an immigrant place her on the “edges of respectability, sanity, and dignity” (Emory 418). Her affair with Lancelot removes her respectability, and events such as the ending of their relationship test her sanity. Yet, continuing to take his financial support for years takes away her dignity. While Rhys seems to fall into her role as a kept woman with some ease, Anna takes issue with trading her body for money. As a result, becoming a prostitute is difficult for Anna. Her greatest issues with prostitution results from her nonchalance about sex. She does not seem to enjoy the sexual act; her first sexual encounter begins with her feeling cold and ends with her looking at items spread out on the dressing table (*Voyage* 32). Perhaps this technique of avoiding an even marginal glance at intercourse reflects the conservatism of the decade of the novel's publication. However, Anna's reticence about sex and sexuality, which is never discussed, make competing with women who are sexually responsive difficult. Because Anna is so nonchalant about intercourse, her first sexual encounter with Carl, the American visitor, ends as blandly as it begins. The last statement Anna makes to Carl before their encounter is “Was your nose broken?” (*Voyage* 132). This comment is hardly the precursor to intercourse and give some insight to why Anna cannot compete with girls like Laurie who are more responsive. Also, Anna's virginal appearance is

only appealing to a point. Despite her failure as a sex worker, it is Anna's carelessness—her inability to work towards a goal rooted in her history as a White West Indian—that contributes to her ultimate failure in England rather than her Otherness.

Although Anna is an Anglo-Caribbean, she challenges several social structures when she states, "I wanted to be black. I always wanted to be black" (Rhys *Voyage* 27). This statement also reinforces Anna's difference and carelessness. Seshagiri posits that Anna's declaration "reveals a dangerous desire to *be* the Empire's other, to locate subjectivity in what imperial discourse has relegated to object-status" (494). Anna's yearning is problematic because the gaze of desire is typically directed away from the Other—the woman of colour—whereas Anna's gaze is directed at the Other. Her desire is neither physical nor romantic but of becoming the Other; she is attracted to the *idea* of being Black. Her desire to absorb blackness is indicative of Anna's difference and her carelessness because she is not cognisant of the troubling history problematising this desire. Anna states, "Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad" she simplifies that complex history (Rhys *Voyage* 27). Anna's statement is problematic because it fails to recognise the complex history of Black female beauty in the West. Anna offers a tolerable, yet slightly simplistic, reason for directing her gaze at the Black female form; however, her perception of being Black does not fully recognise the troubling historical, social, and at times familial relationships between Caribbean Blacks and Whites. Anna's gaze and desire are also slightly troubling because they reinforce the very image into which she has been cast as a West Indian abroad—the woman of colour as a sexual object. While Anna is Caucasian, in England there seems to be an African taint attached to her because of her Caribbean origins. Anna's is a desire fraught with so many complications that even Anna is forced to admit of her Black nanny Francine, "I knew that of course she disliked me too because I was white" (Rhys

*Voyage* 62). While the complications of Anna's desire do not go unnoticed in the novel, they remain unresolved.

Anna's desire to be the Other may be based on Rhys' own limited knowledge of how 'the other half' lives. Aside from her interactions with her favourite nanny Francine, her hated nurse Meta, and a mixed-race classmate who once looked at her with "impersonal, implacable hatred," Rhys' contact with Afro-Caribbeans was severely limited (*Rhys Smile* 49). When Rhys writes about Black Caribbean characters, she is writing about people and experiences that she does not understand or share; the outcome is often characters who want to become like someone they do not know, such as Selina Davis in "Let Them Call It Jazz" (1968). As a child and adolescent in Dominica, Rhys' only interactions with Afro-Caribbeans involved her family's Black servants, who probably seemed strong—like survivors. The White women she interacted with were, largely, distant such as her mother and her mother's twin, Auntie B. Yet, her mother's "coloured" friend Mrs. Campbell is described as "kind, fat and smiling" (*Smile* 43). Perhaps in giving Anna weakness, Rhys is showing that power can breed complacency and carelessness as it did in the White women she observed as a child. These factors, whether Rhys could recognise or acknowledge their impact, contributed to her views on race and impacted her character development. Beryl Gilroy once described Rhys as "a white woman trying to be black" (Bradshaw 391). This is not a compliment as, in the same breath, Gilroy states that Rhys "cannot talk from within her skin" (Bradshaw 391). Whether Rhys could fully admit it or not, Anna is a product of her experiences and, by extension, Anna's failures could be Rhys' as well. Despite Rhys' desire to be the Other, she could never achieve this goal by any stretch of her imagination as race, class, and social privilege separated her from the women she theoretically wished to be. As Gilroy notes, Rhys "had a white skin to take her anyplace she wanted to go," which extends

to her White female characters including Anna (Bradshaw 391). Very few women of colour can make that claim.

With her desire to be the Other, Anna's declaration interrogates every factor contributing to her personality. As a White West Indian woman maternally descended from European planters and paternally one generation out of Scotland, it seems more probable for Anna to embrace the privileges of her race and social class. When Anna confesses her inner-most desire to be Black, to become the Other, she admits "they used to say, 'Your poor grandfather would turn in his grave if he heard you talking like that'" (Rhys *Voyage* 45). The honesty of Anna's confession cannot belie the fact that at the time the declaration is made, it would have been unbecoming for an Anglo-Caribbean woman from a prominent family to voice such a desire. Although Anna feels a strong kinship with Afro-Caribbean people, which was strengthened by her surrogate maternal attachment to Francine, she is descended from a history that is hostile to Blacks. This history of hostility and her attachments to family, heritage, and social role as a Caribbean Creole place Anna at odds with her desire to become the Other.

As a character, Anna also interrogates the idea that being White in any social setting automatically provides a privileged social position. In Dominica, she is privileged because she is White and her maternal family represents the last vestiges of the island's colonial past. Whether Black Caribbeans love or hate her, they must respect, or perhaps fear, her family enough to maintain her inherited privilege. Despite her position, at no point in the novel does Anna express feelings of privilege or superiority. Anna's lack of prejudice is confirmed by her willingness to accept Uncle Bo's biracial children—to embrace them as her cousins when Hester, her English stepmother, would rather that she did not. Anna's acceptance of her Black cousins could indicate that she is guileless—devoid of prejudice, privilege, or superiority. Her acceptance could also

reflect her carelessness; she might not be interested in or concerned with having Black cousins. While Anna appears to be like Anglo-Britons, in reality she is still different. Her dissimilarities place her on the margins of English society and exclude her from any opportunity to take advantage of the benefits of being White in England.

When Anna immigrates to England, she finds that while she has the appearance of a British woman, she is not. She is Othered in English society because she is West Indian<sup>24</sup> and, as such, is different from *actual* English people. As a Caribbean Creole, Anna stands out and her difference is obvious. The first indication of Anna's difference is her voice. One of her landladies refers to Anna's voice as "drawly" while Hester calls Anna's voice "sing-song" (Rhys *Voyage* 26 and 56). In a fit of pique, Hester tells Anna, "Exactly like a nigger you talked—and still do" (Rhys *Voyage* 56). The emphasis on 'bad' English versus 'proper' English is a common theme in British literature. George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913) explores the separation of social classes by language. When Henry Higgins, the play's protagonist, first meets Eliza Doolittle, he states "I know exactly where in London you come from by the awful way you speak – Lisson Grove" (Shaw 5). Later, Henry tells Eliza, "A woman who utters such disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere – no right to live" (Shaw 8). Like Hester, Henry embarks on a colonising mission to help a "creature in the gutter" become a proper English lady (Shaw 9). Like Eliza, Anna is meant to remember that although she looks like Hester, the proper English lady, there is still something coarse and unacceptable about her—some element of Anna that lets the world know that she is not who she appears to be and the way that Anna uses language

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<sup>24</sup> In this instance, the old term West Indian is used rather than the current socio-political and geographical designation Caribbean as Rhys self-identified as a West Indian and Anna Morgan refers to herself as "a real West Indian" (Rhys 47).

confirms her difference. Still, Anna shows that she is careless as she makes no effort to alter her speech—to at least code switch<sup>25</sup> to assimilate.

Throughout the novel, Anna is alienated from the Britons she encounters because she is different in some undefinable way. Early in the novel, this is expressed by her friend and colleague, Maudie, who explains that when Anna shivers nonstop, it is because she is “always cold...she can't help it” (Rhys *Voyage* 12). Maudie expounds on the origin of Anna's cold skin, adding “She was born in a hot place. She was born in the West Indies or somewhere” (Rhys *Voyage* 12). Here, Maudie verbalises the nature of Anna's difference, which can be drawn back to “the West Indies or somewhere” as all “hot places” are alike to Maudie. When Maudie makes this statement to the English men they are with, Jones and Walter, she adds that the other women at work refer to Anna as “the Hottentot” (Rhys *Voyage* 12). Maudie’s statement connects Anna to “depictions of tropical subjects as generically and genetically hot-blooded” and was a common 19<sup>th</sup>-century literary trope (Murdoch 260). This technique was also used by Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre* (1897) in the character Bertha Rochester, the wild-eyed, tangled-haired, mad West Indian Creole woman locked away in the attic but without a valid explanation. Rochester, her jailer *in absentia*, becomes, by the end of the novel, the victim of the hot-blooded island vamp and is literally blinded by her heat when she burns down his estate and he loses his sight in the fire.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, women of colour as hot-blooded vamps was a literary and entertainment trope; the success of Josephine Baker (1906-1975) as a burlesque entertainer in France provides some support for this observation. While there were certainly more talented entertainers, Baker, the Bronze Venus, seemed to gain more attention for her consistently-

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<sup>25</sup> Code switching: in sociolinguistics, “the use of one dialect, register, accent, or language variety over another, depending on social or cultural context, to project a specific identity” (“Code-switching”).

exposed body than for actual talent. By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, although the Hottentot trope had all but vanished from literature, popular culture stereotypes such as Jezebel and Sapphire replaced it. These images became so common that they often bled into the reality of daily life. Writer Judith Ortiz Cofer describes some of the cultural misunderstandings leading to the propagation of these stereotypes in her essay “The Myth of the Latin Woman: I Just Met a Girl Named Maria” (1993). Ortiz Cofer focuses on the stereotype of Latinas as automatically more sexual or hot-blooded, which is based solely on the fact that they are Latinas. Ortiz Cofer writes, “Mixed cultural signals have perpetuated certain stereotypes—for example, that of the Hispanic woman as the ‘Hot Tamale’ or sexual firebrand” (150). Ortiz Cofer received her first kiss on her first date; when she did not “respond with sufficient passion,” her date stated, “I thought you Latin girls were supposed to mature early” leaving Ortiz Cofer what exactly that statement meant (151). Ortiz Cofer’s observations place Anna’s run-ins with this attitude towards ‘foreign’ women in England in contemporary terms. Anna *should* be the hot-blooded sexual firebrand because, like Ortiz Cofer and Bertha Rochester, “She was born in a hot place” (Rhys *Voyage* 12). Both Rhys and Ortiz Cofer interrogate the stereotype of the woman from the tropics being more sensual than women from colder climates. Typically, White women would not be included in this trope; however, Rhys challenges the ‘innocent’ White woman stereotype through her characters Antoinette, the literary response to Bronte’s Bertha, and Anna. They are no more hot-blooded than any other woman; in fact, Anna seems a bit frigid or perhaps simply detached whereas Antoinette, with the simplicity of a child, loves her husband and is trying to maintain his affection. These are the experiences of women who leave their home countries—those hot places—for the Mother Country where gender is as relevant to Caribbean immigrant life in the UK in the first half of the twentieth century as race.

While it is easy to assume that Anglo-Caribbean immigrants suffered fewer rejections than their Afro-Caribbean counterparts, Anna's story offers a different perspective. If white skin is the preferred phenotypic trait, Anna should feel completely at home in England. However, she is constantly at odds with the people and society around her. This is not to suggest that there is aggression on Anna's part or from anyone in the novel, but that Anna is not comfortable with English people because, first and foremost, they are White, and, as such, they are alien to her as Anna grew up around more Afro-Caribbeans than Anglo-Caribbeans. In addition, they are English and Anna is unaccustomed to English life, people, or culture. Anna also longs to be Black because she feels there is a warmth in Black people that is not present in Whites. Her inclination towards Black people makes it difficult for Anna to form a connection to any White English person.

When viewed with other texts from the pre-*Windrush* period, *Voyage in the Dark* challenges several beliefs. There is the belief that immigrants are either welcomed or unwelcomed; wanted or labelled socially undesirable. In addition, the fluidity of each individual immigrant's encounters makes it impossible to predict the treatment another immigrant will receive in the host country. Race is only one chapter of the immigrant story in Britain. While texts like *Voyage in the Dark* give some insight into the negative aspects of White Caribbean immigrant life, these incidents do not comprise the whole. Gender is a significant subtopic in immigration studies and is as relevant as any other factor impacting immigrant life. However, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was little effort to chart the female immigrant experience in Britain, leading to the mistaken popular impression that few women immigrated alone. In addition, there is a stigma attached to women who choose to leave their homes and families for

an unknown country simply to work when they *should* be working in the home. There is something decidedly “un-female” about such women.

Jean Rhys’ text about the Caribbean immigrant experience in Britain before the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* in 1948 fills in the gaps regarding this important historical period in Caribbean literary studies. While Rhys enjoyed some fame as a writer for the early part of her career, her work was still lost to literary studies for three decades. This novel by a writer from a lost generation indicates that it is easy for female writers—particularly those from the so-called Third World—to fall into the fissures of literary history. However, the re-emergence of Rhys’ work confirms she is still culturally, historically, and socially relevant, and that there is much work left to be done in analysing her texts. Although Anna is a character who breezes carelessly through life, within this insouciance is Rhys’ attempt at masking her frustration with immigrant life and the limited opportunities available to women in the pre-WWI years. In *Voyage in the Dark*, Rhys describes the flamboyance of the age but also the underlying social instability precipitating the coming war. Rhys also poses a challenge to the perception of England as the Mother Country—giving backchat to the idea of the West Indian Creoles in the decades before independence simply fitting into English society because they are White. This is an important view to call into question as the next period in Caribbean literary studies in Britain reveals another literary fissure—that of the absence of Caribbean female immigrant writers from the annals of publication in the 1950s. The women of the *Windrush* generation are curiously absent from literary studies. In addition, the *Windrush* period also leads into the long process of decolonisation and its effects on Caribbean citizens of the diaspora. While the *Windrush* generation show little concern for this issue, their children will. “Who are we and where do we

belong?" will be the questions raised by the children of the *Windrush* immigrants, which they work to answer through their writing.

## Arriving on the *Windrush* but Missing the Boat:

### Beryl Gilroy's 'Lost' Novel

To the majority of the passengers on the *Windrush* the arrival was a leap into the unknown, an adventure in which no one knew what they would find (Phillips and Phillips 4).

The *Empire Windrush*, a former German passenger ship taken as a war prize during World War II, docked at Tilbury, London on June 22, 1948 (Phillips "Introduction" par. 4). Its arrival marked a watershed moment in large-scale Caribbean immigration to the UK post-WWII and the beginning of a consistent flow of migration from the Caribbean to Britain. The *Empire Windrush* travelled from Trinidad to England, stopping briefly in Jamaica where 492 Jamaicans boarded to travel to England for work. The group was largely comprised of former servicemen, many of whom migrated to the UK intending to work for a few years or attend university then return home. Other immigrants planned on re-enlisting in the RAF and permanently settling. The arrival of the *Windrush* also marks the beginning of increased Caribbean immigrant writing in Britain as a new generation of young, Caribbean writers began or continued their careers in England. However, what is also significant about the *Windrush* generation is that the more well-known writers from this period are male.

At first glance, the lack of attention paid to female writers could suggest that there were no female writers from this period, but this assumption is inaccurate as there were a few. Some factors that contributed to the absence of Caribbean female writers from the *Windrush* period. These factors include isolation from other writers, no support from writer-based organisations, few mentors, and rejection by male reviewers for publishing firms. Literary theorist Sandra Courtman notes, the *Windrush* arrival "provided the media with a focus for anxieties surrounding black, and initially male, immigration from the British colonies" (86). A preoccupation with male immigrants and their stories often meant failing to acknowledge women's stories in an

economic migration like the *Windrush*. This section examines the work of one Caribbean female immigrant writer living and writing in the Britain during the *Windrush* period: Beryl Gilroy. Gilroy's novel *In Praise of Love and Children* (1996) and her autobiography *Black Teacher* (1976) provide some insight into the experiences of *Windrush*-era Caribbean female immigrants. Because much of the historical information is silent on the lives of women, *Windrush* migration is explored from the male perspective, specifically, E.R. Braithwaite's autobiography *To Sir, With Love* (1959), which can be used to fill some of those historical gaps. Braithwaite's work is particularly helpful as both Braithwaite and Gilroy were highly-educated Caribbean immigrants who became teachers in England. Gilroy taught in Guyana until 1951 when she left the country to attend university in England. After earning a Diploma in Child Development, and, although she was qualified to teach, Gilroy took a series of service-industry jobs. Gilroy taught for a few years before taking a hiatus for 12 years to be a stay-at-home mum. Soon after returning to teaching in 1968, Gilroy became the first, Black, head teacher in the UK. Gilroy's journey was neither unencumbered nor direct, and it took her almost 20 years in England to achieve success. However, Gilroy's autobiography is helpful in outlining the experiences of many Caribbean female immigrants in Britain in the decade after the *Windrush*.

Information is limited on the Caribbean female immigrant experience during the *Windrush* period, and the information that exists does not provide an entirely clear image of the systemic and structural barrier impeding these women. Several factors impacted these women's lives that are incomparable to the Caribbean male immigrant experience in the 1950s. This research seeks to identify the methods that women writing in certain historical periods, specifically the *Windrush* period, can use to pose challenges to the norm, which during this period was the expectation of living the ideal woman's life. In the UK post-WWII, the ideal

female life narrative was of a White, English-born, Christian wife, mother, and homemaker. This narrative excluded some British women, so many immigrants could not begin to fit any of these narratives. In her texts, Gilroy poses challenges to the social and familial expectations placed on Caribbean immigrant women in Britain during the 1950s. In the preface to *Black Teacher*, educator Morgan Dalphinis writes,

the initial issues raised in Gilroy's book remain extremely relevant to our present realities in a society in which all the brutalities of fascist organisations lurk again like bind weed across a post-war Europe in which the words of Césaire are now more prophetic than ever, 'Hitler is not dead' (ix).

Dalphinis describes the social climate that greeted Beryl Gilroy when she arrived from Guyana in 1951 and again in 1953 when, after completing her degree at the University of London, she attempted to obtain a teaching post in a predominantly White society. Gilroy's *Black Teacher* (1976) also provides an honest assessment of the experiences of a female Caribbean immigrant living in England in the 1950s and 1960s. Like Melda, Gilroy finds that in England her life is "clouded by an obsessive interest in my 'blackness'" and no one wanted Gilroy to forget that her colour was an issue for them (*Teacher* 62).

*In Praise of Love and Children* (1996), Gilroy's first novel, remained unpublished for four decades. An unpublished paper by Gilroy notes that this "migration novel...was 'written in 1959' but lost until 1994" (Courtman 84). *In Praise* is like Gilroy's other fictional pieces: startlingly truthful. In the novel, Gilroy gives a fictional account of the experiences of an Afro-Caribbean woman who immigrates to England in the early 1950s. While the novel is brutally honest, it is simply not as well-executed as Gilroy's later work, indicating that at this stage in her writing career Gilroy was a novice. *In Praise* lacks the confidence of *Black Teacher* (1976) and

the poetic flow of *Frangipani House* (1986). Gilroy stated that her development as a writer suffered because she “was largely isolated from [other] writers,” reaffirming the importance of the role the BBC programme *Caribbean Voices* played in the development of regional writers, although it was a boy’s club despite Una Marson’s leadership from the 1930s to the 1940s (Courtman 95). Many now-famous Caribbean male writers of the 1950s honed their craft under the careful tutelage of *Caribbean Voices* impresario Henry Swanzy, who assumed this role when Marson returned to Jamaica in 1946.

Courtman argues that had Gilroy “been able to benefit from seeing the early work of West Indian authors and enjoyed the constructive patronage of those same BBC networks, *In Praise* might have been a different novel” (95). *In Praise*, unlike the male novels of the *Windrush* period, did not have an audience; Gilroy wrote a book, but it is doubtful that she had specific readers in mind. In addition, there was no audience to whom her work would have appealed in the 1950s UK. Although there were a growing number of Afro-Caribbean immigrants in Britain at the time, the likelihood that many of these immigrants would have read her work is slim. However, perhaps if the novel had been written in the US, it might have found an audience, albeit a small one. Also, Gilroy did not consider the fact that immigrants enter a country with a specific goal; their involvement with work, education, or both left little time to consider anything else. Few would be interested in reading the work of an unknown housewife (at the time) about an immigrant spinster teacher who becomes a foster mother.

In an interview with Roxann Bradshaw, Gilroy describes *In Praise* as “a very profound book” (385). However, what this “profound book” lacked is tied to Gilroy’s experiences as a Caribbean female immigrant in England. Courtman writes, “in the 1950s, Gilroy was an anomaly and without precedent; consequently, her contemporaneous ‘novel of migration’ failed to find a

publisher until 1996” (84). One explanation, which Gilroy proposed, is “publishers did not know how to read her work in the early 1960s” (Courtman 91). In contrast, Caribbean male writers such as Selvon, George Lamming, and V.S. Naipaul, also writing in England at the time, were successful and eventually became the ‘faces’ of the post war era, Caribbean immigrant writing movement in England. Caribbean male writers were more successful because, “[t]he path to publication was eased for male West Indian authors who seemed able to satisfy the growing curiosity about other cultures” (Courtman 92). For example, Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), which can be described as a Caribbean hustler’s handbook, was not only accepted for publication but has enjoyed a long history of inclusion in post-colonial literature studies that none of Gilroy’s works can claim. The question is why Selvon’s novel of Caribbean innocents abroad would receive such a warm reception, and Gilroy’s novel of a Caribbean schoolteacher turned foster mother was shelved for 40 years.

When Courtman interviewed Gilroy in 1995, Gilroy stated that her path to publication in the 1950s was barred by the same Caribbean male writers who enjoyed success and who she described as “opinionated West Indian males playing the Gender Game” (Courtman 93). Gilroy believed that “the main barrier to her development [as a writer] was not on account of a lack of sympathetic editors” but “a result of the role played by ‘[m]ale readers for publishers’” (94). Gilroy’s novel was read by “West Indian male writers who were employed to read niche manuscripts that might be considered foreign to British tradition” (Courtman 94). Gilroy believed that those male writers “turned to the idiosyncratic and fastidious” to prove their intellectual abilities and value to the publisher companies that employed them (Courtman 94). In looking back at Gilroy’s predicament, male reviewers and publishers could not connect with a woman’s story and Gilroy fully admits that she works from her “own historical past” (Bradshaw

381). Gilroy was also ahead of her time as her protagonist is Black, female, Caribbean, and working class; male readers in the 1950s could not connect with such a character.

Courtman observes that the records of the female passengers on the *Windrush* have been overshadowed by the stories of their male counterparts. The repetition of 492 Jamaican male passengers, as their arrival played into the fear of the ‘black’ nation, was a constant theme. However, Courtman notes that 1027 people, both passengers and crew, arrived on the *Windrush* (87). There were 941 adult passengers, of which “257 were women with 69 of them accompanied by their husbands and 188 traveling alone” (Courtman 87). Of the 188 traveling alone, 60 were Polish female survivors of Siberian prison camps. However, in the stories of the *Windrush*, only Evelyn Wauchape, the stowaway, and the 60 Polish women make an appearance. The remaining female passengers were overshadowed by, if not completely erased from, the *Windrush* legends only to make eventual appearances in fiction and the public imagination as ‘loose women’ despite their marital status and the fact that the Caribbean societies were, and still are, conservative. The ‘historical past’ of these women cannot be remembered and recorded if their stories are buried beneath the records of other immigrants.

Another one of the issues with *In Praise* is that it is not an easy read; while the language is standard Guyanese, or perhaps British English, the text is quite complex. Like her short stories of the same period, which were also subsequently rejected, *In Praise* was considered “too psychological, strange, way-out, difficult to categorize” (Gilroy *Leaves in the Wind* 213 as cited in Courtman 94). Gilroy narrates the story of a marginalised character: a Black female immigrant from Guyana whose dream is to teach primary school in England. This is also a character that suffered physical abuse at the hands of her stepmother over her entire childhood and spends much of her adulthood trying to reconcile with her, at times, horrific years of development.

Melda is a rich, multi-dimensional character, demonstrating that women did not have to exist within the wife/motherhood paradigm. Women were supposed to be wives then mothers, but Melda does not have these goals—at least not in the traditional sense. In writing a female character in 1950s British society with these traits, Gilroy questions female roles in the decades following the war and the position Caribbean female immigrants occupied in British society.

*In Praise of Love and Children* (2007), Gilroy clearly depicts the experiences of Caribbean female emigrants living and working in England during the *Windrush* period, challenging the limited and often stereotypical roles given to Caribbean female characters in 1950s fiction. This novel is, to date, the only published work of an Afro-Caribbean female migrant writer in the UK from this period. Literary history has focused on male writers, and their texts are rarely, if ever, concerned with women's issues. In the novels of Caribbean male writers living in England during the 1950s, female characters are never fully developed and typically assume subordinate roles to male protagonists. *In Praise*, which expresses concern over the plight of the female immigrant, challenges the notion of female characters of colour being one-dimensional. The depiction of an independent female character who makes a conscious decision not to assume the traditional roles of wife and mother questions the belief that women in the post war period *should* focus on marriage and child-rearing, particularly in Britain where many of these measures were publicly promoted.

Historian Wendy Webster notes that after WWII, reconstruction meant rebuilding the nation and the British family. She writes, “[t]he good home was a central image of national progress, well-being and health, and at its centre, in most accounts, was the good mother” (Webster 92). This period in British history saw a marked increase in the “dissemination of scientific advice” focusing on domesticity—specifically a housewife’s duties and mothering

(Webster 93). At the heart of these domestic ideals was White British women; Webster observes, “Black women in Britain, although often seen as primitive and closer to nature than white women, were never held up as role models” (94). Webster theorises that “Black bodies were pathologized as primitive, animal and dirty” but more so Black women’s bodies than Black men’s, which were mythologised (102).

Braithwaite states that while a student in England and a member of the RAF, he had sexual relationships with women and “the color of [his] skin was not important. As a matter of fact it helped” (95). Braithwaite claims that while he “achieved no special notoriety as a boudoir athlete,” his “life in England had not by any means been ascetic,” suggesting that like his fictional counterparts he enjoyed consistent female companionship (95). Although “he frequently observed the disapproval on the faces of English people at the sight of a white woman in a Negro’s company,” relationships between Afro-Caribbean and African men and White English women occurred regularly (Braithwaite 95). Late Trinidadian novelist Sam Selvon (1923-1994) offers many situations in which Black men were pursued by White women because they were assumed to be “boudoir athletes” in his novel *The Lonely Londoners* (1956). In comedic fashion, Selvon’s male protagonist Moses recounts a brief sexual liaison with an anonymous English woman. When the woman has multiple orgasms, “Moses nearly dead with fright because the woman start to moan and gasp and wriggle and twist up she body like a piece of wire” (Selvon 94). Moses is afraid that someone will call the police, so, on his friend Daniel’s advice, he quickly takes the woman “out to Bayswater Road to catch a bus” to Marble Arch and hops off when the bus begins to move (Selvon 95). In interview with former gigolo, Alfred “King Dick” Harvey, Phillips and Phillips record Harvey’s various incidents in which wealthy English women and their husbands engaged his services and the services of other Black male prostitutes,

providing some substantiation to the myth of the Black “boudoir athlete” preserved in non-fiction and fiction. Despite the significant contribution that Selvon’s fiction makes to perpetuating the myth of Black men’s sexual abilities, there is some element of sadness as these men are no better than objects because in those instances when the characters describe being paid for sex they know the origin of this desire is a stereotype (Selvon 98). The commonality of the myth of the Black male as sexually proficient translated into the body of Black male immigrants being viewed as sexual prizes and used as such, albeit willingly.

On the other side of this gendered issue, the body of the Black female immigrant in the 1950s was not viewed in the same way as her male counterpart. Even if she is a ‘good’ wife and mother by ‘English standards’, she is still considered ‘dirty’. For example, while Gilroy gives no detailed accounts of White men pursuing romantic or sexual relationships with her, she does give an account of a White colleague who had a wasp trapped in the collar of her blouse telling her “Don't ever touch me. Keep your hands off me!” when Gilroy tried to use her handkerchief to remove the wasp (*Teacher* 63). This same woman allowed a homeless man to help her, touching not only her collar but her neck to remove the wasp. Gilroy states, “Rather the tramp and his filth, rather the wasp, rather even the sting of the wasp, than the slightest touch from me” (*Teacher* 63). Here, Gilroy clearly articulates the perception of the Black female immigrant whose skin colour makes her loathsome and her touch like poison. However, Gilroy also states that the children liked her hands as she always touched them gently. Occasionally, the children even kissed her hands because “they was [sic] kind” (Gilroy *Teacher* 70).

In contrast to Braithwaite and Selvon’s characters that are the objects of desire because of their complexions and the myth about their sexual prowess, when Gilroy becomes a mother she is subjected to the attitude that Black women are ‘dirty’ when her son is born. Gilroy takes infant

Paul to the Welfare Clinic where they wait to see a doctor. Gilroy “was forced by the delay in seeing the doctor to feed him there” (*Teacher* 112). The appearance of her “brown breast with the darker circle around the nipple was a major attraction to the woman who sat beside” her, leading to questions about “that blackness round ‘er tits” being good for the baby (*Teacher* 112). Here, Gilroy gives further insight into the perception of the Black female ‘dirty’. The upside to this incident was the Health Visitor pouncing on the woman, pointing out that Paul was healthy, beautiful, and in sparkling white nappies. However, the societal impression of Black women as filthy was not reversed in this one, brief encounter.

Like Gilroy, her character Melda from *In Praise* arrives in London from Guyana to find work as a teacher. In the interim, she shares a flat with her older brother, Arnie. Unlike some typical female characters, Melda is not interested in finding a husband or having children in the traditional manner. As a result, Melda is a less than acceptable female character from this period because she does not fit the schema of a typical British housewife or aspiring housewife. Like Selina from “Let Them Call It Jazz,” she is trained and has a goal; she wants to become a teacher, which is much like Gilroy whose “Attachment to an occupational identity as a teacher” is the main theme of her autobiography (Webster 146). Melda also has her brother Arnie in London—a family connection—and Melda needs to take care of Arnie as caring for her brother maintains her attachment to home and family in a way that growing up within a family with an abusive parent did not.

The goals of becoming a teacher and taking care of Arnie quickly become impossible as Melda is confronted with racism, both overt and covert, which Gilroy refers to as “subliminal racism” (Bradshaw 390). In addition, Melda must compete for Arnie’s attention with Trudi, Arnie’s White German girlfriend, who is, at times, cruel to Melda and merciless in her constant

manipulations of Arnie. Trudi completely refuses to recognise that there are differences between her and Arnie although those differences eventually tear them apart for a time. In the end, Melda turns her attention away from Arnie and family, devoting her life to caring for children.

Melda observes that in the 1950s, “Children from the West Indies had begun to come to England” (Gilroy 31). Gilroy demonstrates the reality of immigration, noting that parents often migrated first, and children followed. Melda’s wants to teach immigrant children “with love for our region in [her] heart” if only the Divisional Office will give her a post (Gilroy 31). Here, Melda articulates one of the issues with British education versus British colonial education, and the impact of those differences on immigrant children. In the pre-independence Caribbean, regional children learned about the contributions of other colonies throughout the Empire. In contrast, English children learned very little about the colonies, which could create stereotypical beliefs about immigrant children and teachers. English schools could be sites of emotional turmoil for newly-arrived Caribbean children who endured bigotry at the hands of classmates and English teachers. After a month, Melda’s credentials to arrive from Guyana, and she is given a job in a school beginning in the New Year; however, Melda’s new job is fraught with issues stemming from prejudice and a series of misunderstandings. When Melda first goes to the school to meet the other faculty and staff, she is in a meeting in which she cannot “always pick up on the speech of those around” her, but if she asks “a question, some of the others grew impatient” (Gilroy *In Praise* 39). Despite what the people of the metropole may think, they do not speak the most academic form of their own languages, which can be confusing to newly-arrived visitors who learned an academic version of the metropolitan language

Often people from the so-called Third World experience great difficulty in understanding metropolitan speech although they have adopted these languages because, once they arrive in the

metropole, they soon realise that they are often better educated in the use of these languages than the actual citizens. Anne Spry Rush notes that “[f]rom the late nineteenth-century through the twentieth-century colonial period, education was, for West Indian children, an immersion in Britishness” (22). Part of that immersion into Britishness and the process of educating British subjects in the colonies was acquiring of the English language because to “be civilised was to speak English” (Gilroy *In Praise* 55). Late psychiatrist and theorist Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) observed a psychological origin for the colonised acquiring the metropolitan language, positing that “The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards” (9). The acquisition of the “language of the civilizing nation” becomes the vehicle through which the colonized can become “whiter” (Fanon 9). From Fanon’s perspective, the root of this psychological turmoil is “an inferiority complex...created by the death and burial of...local cultural originality” (9). In the Caribbean, three or more cultural heritages died and were buried in the British imperial mission, and by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only European languages remained in the region.

Caribbean teachers hoping to teach in Britain in the early years of regional immigration faced more than a language barrier. The children were overwhelmingly hostile towards Black teachers—even the six-year-olds that Melda taught. They either cried, complained, or outright threatened Melda, stating that they would bring “their dads to ‘bif’ [her] and even about going ‘on strike’” (Gilroy *In Praise* 54). In addition, Melda’s colleagues doubt her abilities. The headmaster and some of Melda’s colleagues assume that she will not be a passable teacher because she is not English, meaning that she is not White and because she is a foreigner. Gilroy’s personal experiences reveal a stigma attached to Black teachers in Britain during the 1950s, which meant that “to succeed as a black teacher, an immigrant had to be twice as good as

everyone else” (Gilroy *Teacher* 108). In a school filled with teachers who behave more like lion tamers and students who misbehave with regularity, Melda seems like the only ‘normal’ person and the best-trained teacher of them all as she “specialised as a teacher of reading” (Gilroy *In Praise* 59). Although Melda is a well-trained, experienced, dedicated, and caring teacher, she can never receive credit for achieving excellence in teaching because English schools could see her only as a Black immigrant.

In his autobiography, Braithwaite states “I did not become a teacher out of any sense of vocation,” which is the opposite of Gilroy and her fictional creation, Melda (33). Braithwaite admits that he was motivated “by the very urgent need to eat” (33). After being demobilised from the RAF, Braithwaite was unemployed for almost two years because no English companies would hire a Black man as an engineer—particularly if his subordinates would be White English men. Braithwaite’s doctorate and his experience working for Standard Oil in Aruba for two years before the war were irrelevant. He was still Black, and race determined whether he got a job in England in the 1950s. When he got his first teaching job in London’s the East End, Braithwaite was in a similar predicament to Melda’s. He was not really expected to teach but to maintain order during the school day. It was a given that he should be able to accomplish this goal because he was Black and male, and administrators probably assumed that his appearance would positively impact his ability to keep students in line.

Gilroy migrates to England to teach; specifically, she is “excited by the new techniques, especially those related to child development,” and goes to England to study and train in these methods (*Teacher* 10). After earning her diploma, Gilroy describes how her “applications for a teaching post in an Infants’ School” becoming an issue, which she referred to as “the matter” because “The fact was that, as a Guyanese, [she] simply could not get a teaching post” (*Teacher*

10). Later, she observes, while waiting in the Divisional Office, that “Coloured teachers were a rarity” as she looked around and noticed that she was the only teacher of colour present (Gilroy *Teacher* 44). Racial discrimination meant that only one school would give Gilroy an opportunity to teach: a Catholic school. When she meets Sister Consuelo, the head teacher, she is first told in a matter-of fact manner, “You’re not coal-black,” which is stated “in such a way that it carried no prejudice” (Gilroy *Teacher* 47). However, in the next breath, Sister Consuelo states, “I want a good teacher, and I’m sure you’re that,” which, after months of not being allowed to teach because she is a Black woman from the Caribbean, probably meant a lot to Gilroy (Gilroy *Teacher* 47).

In the Caribbean, school “was a serious place—a place of struggle and encounter” (Gilroy *Teacher* 15). The reality in the region was “[t]he way out of the mire of ignorance and poverty rested upon getting some sort of education” (Gilroy *Teacher* 16). Melda observes that while “The black children [she] had taught at home did not shout at, challenge or disobey any teacher... These children chose when to obey, when to listen, or when to co-operate” (Gilroy *In Praise* 53). Melda “got the rejects” that are “mostly [her] own kind” (Gilroy *In Praise* 54). In this, Gilroy and Melda are no different from Braithwaite, who inherits a class of students in London’s East End who successfully frightened off their last teacher. Braithwaite expected “straight rows of desks, and neat, well-mannered, obedient children,” which is what he would have seen in the Caribbean (14). However, in the secondary school to which he is assigned, all that he can detect is that it is not unlike a “menagerie” (Braithwaite 14). To combat the issues with discipline and teach, Braithwaite is strict, bringing the students’ in-class verbal antics to a swift end. In time, he earns their respect whereas if he had tried to be too friendly, he might have suffered the same fate as his predecessor. Braithwaite’s students are disruptive because they

sense that they are ‘rejects’—society’s working-class, disposables. These students were not the only ones in this predicament to act out of frustration.

There are also many reasons for the disruptive behaviour among Melda’s students, particularly the immigrant children. Melda observes that the most relevant reason involves how immigrant children are treated within the English school system. The headmaster regularly expresses his desire to leave the school because he does not like change and believes that “foreign children, no matter how able, blighted the system” (Gilroy *In Praise* 55). The staff “saw all foreigners, whatever their age or education, as uncivilised. To be civilised was to speak English, and, more importantly, to be English” (Gilroy *In Praise* 55). Therefore, when new immigrant children came to school completely trusting and willing to be co-operative, their behaviour changed as soon as “they realised that nothing they did could truly please their teachers” (Gilroy *In Praise* 55).

The attitudes of the teachers towards the immigrant students should not be reduced to the essentialist position that “White” teachers simply discriminate against “Black” students. While prejudice is an issue, and a very relevant one, there is more to the teachers’ attitudes. Resistance to change is working in unison with racial prejudice to create an unpleasant working environment. There is the added issue of cultural misunderstandings. While the immigrant children from the Anglophone Caribbean are familiar with British culture, English teachers are not familiar with Caribbean culture. Melda observes that “It was not only race and colour, but the way people reached conclusions about others, that caused conflict” (Gilroy *In Praise* 57). From the perspective of the British teachers, these newly-arrived immigrant students represent another massive, social paradigm shift that they are forced to acclimatise to when they are still in

recovery from another massive shift, namely WWII. It was not fair to expect the teachers to simply accept this new change.

Melda also contends with parents who are either not sure what to make of her or completely hostile. In *Black Teacher*, Gilroy describes her inability to connect with Afro-Caribbean parents because they did not completely trust her. Melda also notices that the “West Indian parents weren’t sure about” her because she had “only just arrived and in their eyes was a ‘learner’ who could not help their children’s progress” (Gilroy *In Praise* 54). Melda’s interactions with the White English parents are often unpleasant and hostile, but occasionally they take a violent turn. When a child in her class steals ten pounds from her purse, the child’s mother comes to school and advises Melda to put her “purse where the kids can’t get at it” because leaving it where she did is “placing temptation on them” (Gilroy *In Praise* 56). When Melda answers that the child should behave like a “decent Christian child” and not steal, the mother’s response is to spit on her (Gilroy *In Praise* 56). Melda drags the mother into the staff room, where she kicks Melda, and Melda responds by giving her “a stinging smack which quickly brought her to her senses” (Gilroy *In Praise* 56). Melda had never touched a White person and is shaken by the experience. In this series of events, Melda is the guilty party not the mother. No one helps her during the assault although there is a witness to the attack. Braithwaite faces no such issues in the East End. If the parents are annoyed with their children being taught by a Black man from the Caribbean, they either do not state it or Braithwaite does not record it. Getting his students to listen and learn seems effortless in both the film and book version of Braithwaite’s story. Like Braithwaite’s autobiography, Gilroy’s autobiography does not provide any accounts of violence directed at her by parents or faculty, which gives the impression that

teachers of colour in the UK lead relatively trouble-free existences except for incidents of racial discrimination.

Scholar Christopher Pole's research on Black teachers in Britain provides some additional insight into the experiences of teachers of colour in a majority White education system. Although his research specifies "black teachers," Pole writes, "[t]he term 'Black Teacher' is taken from the study by [Audrey] Osler (1997), who states that all participants in her study, to a greater or lesser extent, accepted the term 'black'" (326). Pole, mirroring Osler, uses the term "black" as a catch-all designation for people of colour. Citing the work of Barry Troyna, Pole writes,

the everyday lives and career experiences of teachers have been largely deracialised within the sociology of education as traditional stereotypes of the teacher as white, middle-class and male have been perpetuated in many studies of school, classrooms and teachers' work (313).

Pole, referencing Gilroy and Braithwaite's autobiographies, suggests that "the experiences of some of the first black teachers in this country...are indicative of a novelty surrounding early black teachers" (314-315). Historically in European countries, "teaching has remained a career which few black people have sought to follow" perhaps because the economic benefits are not as lucrative as in other careers (317). In addition, as Gilroy reports in *Black Teacher*, not many schools were willing to hire a female teacher or one of colour in the 1950s, resulting from the need to rebuild the British family post-WWII as Webster contends. Gilroy observed that when she was applying for a teaching position, "Men predominated. They seemed to come mainly from the white Commonwealth" (*Teacher* 44). However, the issues that Melda faces are not indicative solely of the novelty of a Black teacher in Britain in the 1950s; Braithwaite, teaching

during the same historical period, did not have similar experiences but Gilroy did. Instead, the novelty is a combination of three factors: race, nationality, and gender. Melda is a Black female teacher from the Anglophone Caribbean working in Britain. If the statistics of the *Windrush* are reviewed, there were 128 single women on board. Historically, women traveling alone have been viewed with suspicion, and Melda is a single woman, but Melda also faces social isolation because she is a Caribbean immigrant.

Melda, like Braithwaite, soon realizes what many non-White Commonwealth immigrants coming to Britain probably recognised as soon as they tried to create spaces for themselves and their families in the UK. First, immigrants learn that “it is wonderful to be British—until one comes to Britain” (Braithwaite 39). Then, these newly-arrived immigrants also soon understand that they are “British, but evidently not...Briton[s]” (Braithwaite 42). This is an important observation for non-White Commonwealth immigrants who want to teach in Britain because they are in the position of instructing students in a way of life that they learned before they immigrated but also a way of life that excludes them. Yet, they do their jobs and work with students who have often been inculcated with the belief that black skin is inferior to white, or perhaps that black skin is deficient in some unnameable way.

Under the most ideal conditions, teaching can be a challenge. Gilroy writes, “Life, as a teacher in another country, was difficult enough without the added complication of animosity” (*Teacher* 76). Add to Gilroy’s contention the fact that being an immigrant teacher of colour in a country with a majority White population, and teaching can be quite difficult. When reading Gilroy’s autobiography, teaching seems effortless; however, Gilroy admits that she “learnt that to succeed as a black teacher, an immigrant had to be twice as good as everyone else” (*Teacher* 108). Challenges, whether in the classroom with the students, with extremely prejudiced parents,

or with overtly racist colleagues, are addressed quickly and resolved, if not with ease, then with patience. Teaching is the connection between Gilroy, Braithwaite, and Melda, but, for Melda, there is another issue that is unique to the female immigrant experience: that of coping with family during a migration.

Melda, who only teaches at one English school before giving up the profession entirely, becomes a social worker because she is “interested in helping children” (Gilroy *In Praise* 72). Melda finds that in the process of immigrating to Britain from the Caribbean, children suffer the most. While Gilroy does not address the situation of children initially being left at home while the parents immigrate in the novel, she does discuss the children who arrive in Britain and the incredible paradigm shift that they are asked to accept as the norm; this is addressed through Melda’s observations. Melda believes that “the droves of men, women and children who were coming in from the West Indies” were doing so “to beat the new immigration act<sup>26</sup>” (*In Praise* 74). In this flood of immigrants, it is easy for children to be lost. Melda mentions that Caribbean children do not live within their immediate families but in a large network of family and neighbours; therefore, Caribbean children are rarely alone or neglected. In Britain, “There were pressures on parents that enforced neglect of their children and temptations that touched unsupervised children” (Gilroy *In Praise* 74). Parents worked long hours often at great distances from home and for companies or organisations that maintained a colour bar. Spending most of the day away from home left children home alone or with caretakers, who were often careless with childcare. Immigrant parents were also resistant to change. Melda finds that “Some of their

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<sup>26</sup> Melda could be referencing the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, which passed three years after the novel was completed. This Act was a move by the Conservative Party government to limit immigration into Britain after WWII, limiting immigration from the Commonwealth unless the immigrant already held a British passport or obtained a work voucher. It seems that this Act served the additional purpose of reducing the number of immigrants entering Britain who were unemployed and reliant on government aid. For additional information, see “The Commonwealth Immigration Act 1962” in the National Archives.

problems arose because they did not accept change and behaved as if they were still back home” (Gilroy *In Praise* 86). Finally, there was a loss of identity. When Caribbean immigrant workers arrived in Britain, they “went from having a firm identity—of family, village, island or religion—to having only a nominal one: foreigner” (Gilroy *In Praise* 86). Immigrant children arrived with only a partially-formed identity and struggled to develop a sense of self perhaps rejecting their Caribbean origins in favour of assimilation or clinging to those ideals more tightly.

When Melda goes on a call as a social worker with her colleague Lizzy, she meets Mr. Downer, a Jamaican widower with three daughters. Mr. Downer has been brought up believing that discipline means corporal punishment, so that is his preferred method with his unruly girls. When faced with the children’s removal from his home, Mr. Downer tells Melda and Lizzy “I don’t want my girls put with an alien race, who have slave-master contact with black since time immemorial” (Gilroy *In Praise* 81). Melda remembers that in the Caribbean “we were used to ‘passing on’ troublesome children to grandparents, but with nowhere else to turn, local authority children’s homes became the ‘grandparents’ house” (Gilroy *In Praise* 74). There is also the added issue of race. Melda fondly remembers the women of the yard<sup>27</sup> who helped her mother to care for her and many other children. These women often took responsibility for unrelated children just as a way of supporting each other—seeing each other through challenging times. The children in their care “were never in danger of attack from people who hated [their] colour” (Gilroy *In Praise* 74). The women of the yard supported each other so that social services were not needed. However, in the UK Caribbean immigrant parents quickly found themselves at a loss

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<sup>27</sup> In Trinidad and in some other Caribbean countries, the ‘yard’ was the barracks yard. This is an area created by the formation of barracks around a centralized space. The yards were usually for labourers and their families and became close-knit communities. For more information, see *Trinidad Carnival: The Cultural Politics of a Transnational Festival* (2001).

regarding child rearing and at the mercy of a system they did not understand and one that did not always have their or their children's best interests at heart.

Throughout the novel, Melda remembers those women who loved and mothered her when her stepmother would not. This alternative form of mothering is common in the Caribbean; communal mothering demonstrates that the parenting paradigm promoted in European societies is not always effective in other societies. As a result, alternative mothering creates not only a form of mothering that challenges the European norm and the belief that 'European' implies adequate whereas non-European suggests a deficit. In this regard, Mr. Downer's comment about relinquishing his daughters to members of an "alien race, who have slave-master contact with black" comes to mind. Within the contextualisation of the term "slave-master contact" is the overarching trope of colonisation. Mr. Downer not only fears that his daughters will experience discrimination in the English foster-care system, but that they will be forcibly assimilated. Gilroy exposes the inadequacy of the European-styled motherhood model to ethnic groups from communal societies and the inability of British social services system to recognise cultural differences. A social services system that is more open to acknowledging cultural differences might be more helpful to the immigrant children Melda encounters.

Melda soon becomes disenchanted with a social services system that seems to target Black children and their parents instead of helping the former and supporting the latter. In addition, she observes that "when they are taking black children, they always ask [her] to go along and help" (Gilroy *In Praise* 82). Melda is used by social services; she becomes the Black face that dulls the blow of the state taking children from their parents. After witnessing the separation of a six-year-old bi-racial child from his English mother because of neglect, Melda is so overcome by the scene, that, in that exact moment, she decides to become a foster mother.

Melda uses the remainder of her inheritance, which she received from her former teacher Mrs. Penn, to find a house on a short lease. The first child that Melda fosters is Boscoe Shatner, the little boy whose separation from his mother impacts her. When they meet again, Boscoe is filled with “healthy distrust” of Melda because he remembers that she removed him from his mother’s care (Gilroy *In Praise* 89). Melda suggests that Boscoe “Come and try” her place to “See if [he’d] like [her] to foster” him (Gilroy *In Praise* 89). Boscoe remains with Melda until he goes to university, and Melda decides to immigrate to the US to be with her some of remaining family.

Children come in and out of Melda’s care, and, regardless of how the children behaved or treated her, Melda “learned never to treat children as Ma had treated” her (Gilroy *In Praise* 134). Melda realises as the years pass that the children she fostered “were the victims of the worst kind of devilry: beatings, starvation, neglect, torture all were used against them to further the ends of those who ‘cared’ for them” (Gilroy *In Praise* 121). In this respect, Melda has much in common with these unwanted and unloved children as she was abused by her stepmother, but Melda’s father loved and protected her. Incidents of physical violence in this novel are significant because the abuse Melda received at the hands of her stepmother, who she believed to be her biological mother until she was about 12, increased her empathy and caring towards other children who fell between the cracks of families and the social service system. Melda makes a conscious decision not to become the monster who reared her.

In the end, Melda remains a foster mother for almost 20 years. Although it may seem as if Melda’s life was filled with strife, it was not. Melda gains children through Boscoe and Olive, Melda’s former foster son and daughter, although these children do not come to her in the traditional way. By fostering and adopting Boscoe and Olive, Melda demonstrates that the traditional British mothering model promoted in the 1950s was not as effective among Caribbean

immigrants because immigration can break some families apart. The needs for employment combined with the separation of parents from each other and their children in addition to a lack of community support meant that the traditional nuclear family may not have consistently been a reality among Caribbean immigrants in Britain. Melda also receives a letter and discovers that “the Queen...had heard of [her] work and [her] love of children” and “was going to present [her] with the Member of the British Empire” for her years of dedicated work with children (Gilroy *In Praise* 133). Not only does Melda smooth the frayed edges of her own childhood and those of other neglected children, but she is publicly acknowledged for her efforts. After decades of living and working in Britain, Melda observes that “Blacks always got crumbs or nothing” (Gilroy *In Praise* 133). Therefore, Melda’s formal acknowledgement by the Queen is symbolic of the incorporation of formerly colonised subjects and immigrants into a modern nation that they helped to build. Ultimately, Melda is honoured for her service to *all* children, not solely Black or immigrant children.

Another section of this dissertation argues that Caribbean female writers can and have fallen easily into the fissures of history. The records associated with the *Windrush* passenger list indicate that Caribbean female immigrants also fall into these historical fissures. Although their text on the *Windrush* is very informative, the issue with Mike and Trevor Phillips’ research is that it provides very little information on Caribbean women. There is brief mention of women in the WRAF, an interview with MP Dianne Abbott on her time in an English grammar school, the brief account of a housewife, who seems to have, quite literally, remained in her home in England, and a few minor accounts scattered throughout the text. This scarce information provided raises the question, “Did any Caribbean women immigrate to the UK in the *Windrush* period?” In the research about women and migration, the common theme is that women are the

culture-bearers. They ensure the propagation of any indigenous culture in a diaspora. While women were often not in the first wave of immigrants, they were immigrants, so why this absence? For example, research on Caribbean writers living in the UK during the 1950s addresses only male writers—most notably, George Lamming (Barbados), Sam Selvon (Trinidad), or V.S. Naipaul (Trinidad). Courtman also questions “whose achievements will be remembered” in the myth surrounding the *Windrush* generation and its accomplishments (86). Courtman further questions, “When and how do women writers respond to the double humiliation of racial exclusion and patriarchal hegemony?” (86).

For Gilroy, the response to “the double humiliation of racial exclusion and patriarchal hegemony” is embedded in the narrative of *In Praise of Love and Children*. There are many obstacles preventing a Black female immigrant from working in Britain in the 1950s; however, the tenacity with which Melda tackles each impediment is a testament to the strength of the character. Melda, despite the abuses she endured during her childhood and the fact that, whether she acknowledges it or not, she is essentially motherless, achieves her goals. In addition, her work with foster children challenges the idea that being a mother is a direct path. She proves that the motherhood element of nation building does not always mean giving birth to children but accounts for the many children who have already been born and lack proper care.

Gilroy’s emphasis on children of colour in England reminds her audience that adults were not the only people impacted by immigration. The children are reminders of the fact that male characters, such as those Sam Selvon wrote about in *The Lonely Londoners*, had sexual relationships with women, but they did not always take responsibility for their children. Men have always received a ‘social pass’ for being less than acceptable parents, but women are expected to shoulder parental responsibilities. In the situation of these abandoned children of

White English mothers and Afro-Caribbean men, what is to be done? By having Melda focus on these children, Gilroy is not only questioning why no one takes responsibility, but she also provides a solution. That solution places an Afro-Caribbean woman in the position of caring for these children when no one else in either community will. In her novel *In Praise of Love and Children*, Gilroy poses many challenges to situations not previously addressed in literature. Gilroy was a ground-breaking author and ahead of her time because she states what many people did not necessarily want to hear. *In Praise* challenges ideas of British identity, society, and women's roles within that society during the 1950s, but at the same time the novel promotes the ideals of family and service to the community. In her first novel, Beryl Gilroy became the first *Windrush*-era Caribbean female writer to give backchat in a text.

### **Andrea Levy's *Windrush* Children: Writing Uneasily, but Writing from Home**

Let them say what they like. Because I am the bastard child of Empire and I will have my day (Levy *Fruit of the Lemon* 326-327).

The 1970s through the 1990s were intriguing decades in Britain because during this thirty-year period the children born to *Empire Windrush* parents became adults. Statistics on the *Windrush* passengers compiled by Sandra Courtman state that of the 941 adult passengers on board the *Windrush*, “257 were women with 69 of them accompanied by their husbands” (87). The presence of the 69 married women on board suggested that, at some point, children would be born on English soil to immigrant parents. The English births of *Windrush* children raised issues that their parents may not have anticipated. For example, their parents likely assumed that because the children were English-born, they would somehow be exempt from the alienation and hostility immigrants experienced on arrival in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. Somehow, a British birth and, by extension nationality, was supposed to prevent these children from feeling like they did not belong in British society. Their parents did not consider that their children’s experiences would share similarities with their own with one exception: caught between two cultures and two ideas of home, their children were constantly in search of their identities.

Political theorist Bhikhu Parekh defines identity as “what defines us or makes us the kind of persons we are and distinguishes us from others” (S251). Specifically, “[i]dentity refers to those features and relationships that are constitutive of us as certain kinds of persons” (Parekh S252). While some traits are fixed from childhood, others result from a variety of internal and external influences and experiences (Parekh S252). Identity is personal, individual, and fluid, requiring that the individual remain true to his or her sense of identity to maintain it (Parekh S252). Literary theorist Irene Pérez Fernández posits that in Levy’s *Small Island* (2004) “space

and identity are malleable categories that are presented as in [a] constant process of re/vision, re/definition and change” (149). Pérez Fernández’s theory could be extended to Levy’s other London-based novels as protagonists in other texts are constantly revising and redefining who they are as self-awareness develops.

Identity is a vexing issue for children born to immigrant parents in a host country for a variety of reasons. With different and often competing or contradictory cultural forces, children of immigrants living in a diaspora are in the process of defining themselves as there are multiple influences shaping who they become over time. If Parekh is accurate and identity refers “to the way we are constituted,” this raises the question of what factors are the most influential to the children of immigrants. Immigrant parents who are more attached to home foster similar connections in their foreign-born children by first reminding them of home through sharing stories and pictures that recreate family history from their point of origin. These immigrant parents tend to send their children home for regular visits with family, typically grandparents, who nurture the children’s attachment to home. Immigrant parents who are more concerned with assimilation tend to withhold information about ‘home’ from their foreign-born children. Perhaps this is done to reduce the likelihood of identity confusion and its resulting stress. These parents focus more on the here and now, striving towards assimilation. Merle Hodge touches on this type of immigrant parent in her short story “Limbo Island” (2006). In the story, Mr. Harris, who is from the Caribbean but living in an American territory in the region, takes pride in the fact that his children are “real...all-Ammuracan” kids who “don’t know a thing about *back-home*” (Hodge 123-124). If the parents have a strong attachment to their home country, their children are often expected to share that connection. However, if the parents are more inclined to assimilation, the emphasis is on making the new country home. It is difficult to state with

certainty which group of children are now more secure in their identities. Such a concrete assessment is impossible to make as identity remains fluid and ever-changing—subject to internal as well as external factors. What can be concluded about the children of immigrants is that they live between two worlds and are constantly in a state of self-reflection, revision, and redefinition.

Within the historical framework of the post-*Windrush* arrival era in Britain, identity became a critical national issue. This period is one in which Britons, spurred on by the Conservative Party but also supported by the Labour Party, attempted to craft a national identity separating ‘us’ from ‘them’ as “to know who I am is also to know who I am not and how I differ from others” (Parekh S252). If identity is now political, one of the goals here is to move away from the political and grapple with identity’s more amorphous qualities; utilising three of Andrea Levy’s novels, which are referred to as her novels of identity in this text, to examine this topic of identity by focusing on the children of immigrants or the second generation. Levy’s novels of identity centre on the nature of the Self. Specifically, Levy addresses the position of the second-generation Black Briton—one whose parents emigrated from the Caribbean but who was born in Britain. Levy’s novels of identity pose a challenge to the belief held by many Britons in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century that the second generation could never become fully integrated into British society—that they could never become ‘real’ Britons. The protagonists wrestle with identity throughout the novels, and the question is often raised of whether they are ‘real’ Britons or merely displaced Caribbeans. Yet, Levy shows that national identity is not simply a birth right or racial affiliation. These protagonists become Britons by facing the challenges of living in a country where, after two generations, they are still viewed as alien and by continuously asserting their right to belong.

Levy, who became internationally recognised for her *Windrush*-era novel, *Small Island* (2004), is one of the most prolific British writers from the *Windrush* children's generation. Levy's novel was a realistic depiction of *Windrush* immigrants, bringing them and their lives into focus and by humanising them in a way that the number 492 never did. Levy is also the author of three novels concerning children born to *Windrush* immigrants: *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1995), *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996), and *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), which this research categorises as Levy's novels of identity because identity is the overarching theme in each text and the thread connecting these novels to each other. In her novels of identity, Levy raises and struggles with the question of identity using the everyday experiences of her protagonists. Specifically, Levy situates the "bastard children of Empire" as being of Caribbean descent but challenging the notion that they are not Britons because they are children of immigrants—specifically, non-White immigrants.

In the 1950s, E.R. Braithwaite described feeling "British, but evidently not a Briton" when he was searching for a job (42). He also often felt the "undisguised prejudice" of Britons in public situations (Braithwaite 8). This unwelcoming attitude that *Windrush* generation immigrants experienced in Britain must have led to the internalisation of feelings of alienation, which could only deepen their confusion as these immigrants were, regardless of the location of their birth, British. Una Marson gives examples of facing prejudice, both overt and covert, and shows that racial discrimination was a common occurrence experienced by Black immigrants in Britain. In her poem "Nigger" (1933) Marson opens with the description of a public incident in which the poem's speaker is called "Nigger" by "little white urchins" (lines 1 and 2). In the second stanza, the poem's speaker asks, "What made me go to my room/And sob my heart away?" (Marson lines 11-12). In these lines, the speaker describes the pain of the immigrant

experience in Britain. Rather than approaching racial discrimination in a theoretical manner, which the speaker does later in the poem, these lines humanise this person who is a casualty of racism but who did not know that she was not a Briton, which is a distinct designation from 'British'. The speaker does not realise that British citizens from parts of the Empire other than the British Isles were not considered British until she arrives in England.

Marson's speaker suffers emotionally from being on the receiving end of hatred that she cannot comprehend, leading to the speaker's discomfort. However, not all Caribbean immigrants had similar experiences. Mary Prince felt and was free for the first time in her life in England. Although she wanted to return to Antigua to her husband, in England she was not a slave and "[t]o be free is very sweet" (Prince 26). Mary Seacole considered England her home and spent the last years of her life there. Jean Rhys, resided in the country for the last thirty years of her life although she was not fond of England. Marson, although feeling alienated in Britain, stayed in England during WWII when she would have been safer in Jamaica. Beryl Gilroy, like Rhys, made England her home from her late twenties until her death at age 77. The connections these writers share are their Caribbean origins and decision to reside in England long-term. The writers discussed in other chapters comprise several generations of Caribbean immigrants who went to Britain feeling like they were British, which is a certain confidence that they were subjects returning to their Mother Country. However, "[a]s 'mother' country...England...left many of its children (by virtue of empire) orphaned, since it...rejected them as 'other', not English, when they arrive from their Caribbean islands" (Lima 59). In addition, these writers migrated to Britain as adults; they made the conscious decision to move thousands of miles from home and live in a country to which they believed that they were connected. Levy, like her protagonists, is British born to Caribbean immigrant parents of the *Windrush* generation and the only British-born

author whose work is examined in this research. The British births of Levy's protagonists in her three novels of identity, although the 'appropriate' location, is not sufficient to settle the issue of who they really are. This research classifies the years after the *Windrush* as the decades of displacement because it is in this thirty-year span that the second generation, British born, and living in Britain is somehow still disconnected from the idea of being British. This predicament is like being at a door, having the key, but finding one's self still barred.

Levy's coming-of-age is contemporaneous to the maturity of some of her protagonists and occurs during the three decades of displacement following the *Windrush's* arrival. As the Caribbean-born parents of many of Levy's protagonists state, because they arrived in Britain as adults, they had a strong sense of identity; they knew who they were because their senses of self, whether related to nationality, culture, or family, were firmly in place. However, their British-born children were in an entirely different position. The *Windrush* children were caught between the cultures of the Caribbean and Britain—typically, Jamaica and England—while growing up in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s. In Britain, they lived in a society with a strong culture of 'whiteness', promoting negative views of Blacks based on the role of Empire in both colonisation and chattel slavery. In addition, the parents of *Windrush* children did not often make attempts to close these fissures between the two cultures by providing their children with an accurate history to counter those negative images and ideas about being Black that they were inundated with daily. For example, Levy recalls that there was no storytelling tradition in her family.

In the Caribbean, storytelling was, until some point in the recent history, a common event in families. In Trinidad, stories begin with the storyteller calling, "Crick?" and the audience, usually comprised of children, replying "Crack!". The use of call and reply encourages

communal storytelling between the generations. However, when Levy asked her parents about their lives before coming to England, their response was “Shut up” (Levy and Morrison 335). Their unwillingness to share some details about their previous lives with their children meant that Levy and her siblings, like her protagonists, had little connection to their parents’ original home, family, or way of life. While these children had a stronger attachment to Britain, the country of their birth, they still felt like outsiders because that is the way that they were treated by other Britons.

In these three novels of identity, Levy challenges certain ideas about the nature of being British, suggesting that the immutability of British national identity is impossible to uphold because identity is subject to change resulting from the impact of various internal and external factors. Levy is concerned with the issue of race as the *Windrush* children are classified as Others if they are Afro-Caribbean; as race is often visible, it is a trait that sets them apart from ‘real’ English people. The *Windrush* children were often tormented for not being British because they are noticeably Black in a nation in which the population is majority White. Levy’s protagonists are repeatedly teased by English children who state that their parents came to England on a banana boat and bananas originate from countries populated by non-Whites. Taunts about arriving on a banana boat extend beyond fictional accounts as Mike and Trevor Phillips describe having similar experiences as children (2). As young adults, Levy’s protagonists are repeatedly asked where they came from because, supposedly, they could not be native to Britain and have darker complexions. Here, Phillips and Phillips state “[i]nvariably, the first question we were asked by new acquaintances would turn out to be ‘Where do you come from?’” (3). Arguably, this is not an entirely unreasonable question given the fact that there were fewer Afro-Caribbeans in Britain in the 1930s than in later decades. Even in 2001, statistics reveal that 92%

of Britain's population was White (Jeffries 13). These experiences and racial pejoratives directed at British Blacks, such as "blackie," "nig-nog," or "wog" throughout Levy's novels of identity demonstrate that the *Windrush* children had much in common with their parents who faced incidents of racism that they did not expect in Britain. *Windrush* children could never be 'real' Britons because there is an assumed underlying correlation between being British and being White. Throughout her novels of identity, Levy questions the supposition that to be a Briton is to be White.

If being British is associated with whiteness, then British national identity can only apply to White Britons as the "politics of 'race' in [Britain] is fired by conceptions of national belonging and homogeneity" (Gilroy *Ain't No Black* 45). Parekh posits that "national identity" is a more current term than identity, going back only to the 1950s and replacing "such earlier terms as 'national character', 'national soul' and 'national genius'" (S251). National identity should, if Parekh is correct, unite the nationals of a country without regard to race. Yet, Gilroy's contention that British national identity is inextricably linked to race provides some real-world support for the issues Levy's protagonists face with being identified as 'real' Britons. Levy's adolescent, second generation characters are set apart from other Britons by the suggestion that although they are English-born, they are assumed to have a tenuous sense of British national identity. As second-generation British citizens, the assumption about Levy's protagonists is that they may have a connection to a 'home' other than Britain. Thus, nationality or, rather, an ambiguous sense of national identity, distinguishes the protagonists in Levy's novels of identity. Levy's characters are British born to newly-arrived parents whose presence in Britain is at the heart of discussions of national identity and belonging. Therefore, these young Black female protagonists growing up in Britain find that they are not truly included in the concept of being a Briton. They

are British, but, because their parents are considered foreigners, there is always a question of whether they are also something else.

In her novels of identity, Levy challenges the idea that being British and Caribbean are completely alien or mutually exclusive states because the respective cultures are completely dissimilar. The perspective of a disparity between the Anglophone Caribbean and Britain is particularly questionable as the Anglophone Caribbean was comprised of British colonies and today remains part of the Commonwealth. The Caribbean and Britain share a cultural identity, and, although those bonds have become less rigid over time, many similarities remain. Therefore, the last factor that isolates Levy's protagonists from other Britons is cultural identity; they may be surrounded by English culture and they may be English with all that this identifier implies but their homes, and perhaps also within themselves, being English or British seems to be in constant competition with being Caribbean or Jamaican/Trinidadian/and any other regional nationality. Levy's texts provide examples of the dissimilarities between British and Caribbean life that are rather mundane, such as West Indian food versus English food. These differences are frequently discussed with humour; however, they can also be sources of contention within families as some children struggle to hold on to their parents' heritage as others struggle against it to assimilate British culture.

Levy's novels of identity interrogate the idea that being British by birth solves the issue of national identity. The first-generation parents seemed to believe that because their children are British born, they will somehow neatly fit into British society avoid issues such as the isolation in British society their parents experienced. This position is best summed up by a *Windrush*-era immigrant character in writer Vernella Fuller's *Going Back Home* (1992) who tells her adult daughters "it will be different for your generation... You have your education, your English

accents” (11-12). The implications of this mother’s statement are that birth, accent, and/or education create not only a space in any given society but a sense of identity within the individual. However, Levy’s characters demonstrate a multiplicity of second-generation concerns that are not easily resolved by birth right or citizenship.

Levy’s novels of identity take place during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, a period which is categorised in this text as the decades of displacement because in this thirty-year span Caribbean and other dark-complexioned immigrants from all over the Commonwealth found themselves at the centre of anti-immigrant, racist rhetoric in Britain. They are geographically displaced as they are away from ‘home’ but also because they are not welcomed in Britain. Specifically, the “late 1970s and the 1980s” are identified as periods during which “immigrants are consolidated presences in British society, a society that is facing major economic changes” (Pérez Fernández 154). While these economic issues are not solely the result of immigration, in countries with large numbers of immigrants, depressed economies are usually blamed on immigrants, who are perceived as drains on the national economy rather than contributors. Although immigrants rarely comprise a significant portion of any country’s population, their presence opens these national discussions. The first generation were inserted into a society that was hostile to any signs of Otherness.

During the 1960s, Conservative politician Enoch Powell (1912-1998) was the most visible and vocal proponent of what could generously be described as immigration reform or condemned as racialism. Essentially, Powell and other Conservative Party members saw the influx of immigrants from the Commonwealth as a danger to Britishness—White Britishness—and the differences between immigrants and Britons set them apart according to Conservative views of British national identity. Specifically, Powell “was convinced that British people would

never accept and assimilate black and Asian immigrants, as their sense of who they were ‘instinctively revolted’ against the alien culture” (Parekh S257). Black immigrant settlers were perceived “as an illegitimate intrusion into a vision of authentic British national life that, prior to their arrival, was as stable and as peaceful as it was ethnically undifferentiated” (Gilroy *Black Atlantic* 7). Powell and the Conservatives were not alone in this anti-immigrant position as many Labour Party members agreed with and supported them, which is evidenced by the letter sent to PM Attlee on the day of the arrival of the *Empire Windrush*. Anti-immigration sentiments of the 1960s were not new. The vocal and public opposition directed toward immigration and settlement from the Commonwealth expressed by Powell and other Conservatives in the 1960s was a continuation of the sentiments expressed in that letter sent to Attlee in 1948. Instead of simply guiding governmental policy towards a solution beneficial to all parties, this opposition served the added purpose of stirring up anti-Black and anti-immigrant sentiment throughout the UK for decades and contributing to a long history of aggression driven by cultural misunderstandings that continue today.

The common theme expressed throughout Powell’s “Rivers of Blood” speech, which was given on 20 April 1968 in response to the Race Relations Bill, was, essentially, the fear of White England becoming a Black nation. Powell and others who shared similar views were overly anxious about the possibility of their White country becoming overrun and overpopulated by Blacks, a view which Powell supported using statistical projections of Britain’s future population. In the speech, Powell, who was supposedly citing the comments made by a constituent, states “In this country in 15 or 20 years' time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man” (par. 7). Whether this statement was made by a constituent or by Powell himself is uncertain; what is true is that these words convey the level of apprehension caused by

the presence of Black immigrants in Britain. In addition, the statement avoids the Empire's role in colonising of a large portion of the world. It seems that Powell and his supporters never anticipated that the Empire's colonial history would come quite so close to home. This period occurs before the historical setting of Levy's novels of identity, which is London. These novels could be credited with reinforcing the notion that imperialism and the resulting post-colonial state "are the shared legacy of all British citizens, rather than a specific concern of those who are 'non-white'" or of those who are British born in the UK (Pérez Fernández 146). While Powell feared Blacks overrunning Britain, there are certain sections of his speech directed specifically at the second generation. Surely, second-generation Caribbean children in Britain, especially if they were school-aged, were aware of Powell's toxic rhetoric and their supposed deleterious influence on his Britain by 'blackening' the nation? These sentiments were typically vented on the previous generation, but, like adults, children's attitudes and dispositions are affected by their experiences and they must have been aware of anti-immigrant sentiments whether expressed on the news or by classmates and teachers in school.

Powell was as concerned with new births to immigrant parents and the arrivals of the children of immigrants in Britain as he was with their parents. His anxiety is intriguing as children are rarely subject to direct and open attacks, not so much in deference to their vulnerability as out of fear of public disapproval for targeting the innocent and vulnerable. Clearly, Powell had no such concerns and neither did his audience. In this speech he stated, "20 or 30 additional immigrant children are arriving from overseas in Wolverhampton alone every week—and that means 15 or 20 additional families a decade or two hence" (Powell par. 16). There is also the apprehension of interacting with immigrant children, who are described as "charming, wide-grinning, picaninnies" (Powell par. 36). Thus, Powell turns his attention from

immigrant parents to their children who he views in terms of their power to incite fear with the wide grins on their Black faces and because in the future they might reproduce, creating more of themselves.

Powell's speech, while vacillating between brilliant execution and ludicrous claims, still provides an excellent snapshot into the mind of a British nationalist circa 1960-1990. The major issue with these nationalists is that the content of their rhetoric quickly devolves from legitimate concern with valid socio-economic issues to racist rant. In addition, they perform a revisionist history in which the British Empire never existed as an agent and beneficiary of colonisation. Wendy Webster observes that "Powell's speech is remarkable in its complete absence of references to empire" (183). However, in an interview in 1991, Powell states that he resigned his position in Australia in 1939 to come home and serve the British Empire during WWII (Webster 183). It is fascinating that to Powell the Empire was relevant in 1939 at the onset of WWII but somehow had become irrelevant by 1968 when former imperial subjects mirrored his actions and came 'home' to England.

This is the disjointed imperial history that Levy attempts to engage with and challenge in her novels. Literary theorist Michael Perfect writes, "Levy's work not only insists on the importance of narrating rather than negating the imperial past but also...asserts that to engage with imperialism and its legacy at all is...to engage with a multiplicity of contrapuntal voices" (32). Levy's characters, both first and second generation as well as the Britons that they interact with, provide a milieu of voices and viewpoints that agree with and counter the political rhetoric of the 1960s to 1980s in an attempt at times to accentuate the inaccuracy of Powell's statements and at other times to concede their logic. Powell's attempt at revisionist history serves a valuable purpose regarding the Black immigrant population in Britain. If there was no Empire, then there

would be no subjects who might feel enough of an affiliation with that Empire to want to come in closer proximity to it. The political discourse of Powell's Britain seems to fold race and national identity into a neat bundle—one that clearly avoids the Empire's history of conquest and chattel slavery but also the reality of that Empire initiating interrelated global economies and other worldwide disparities such as war, poverty, and under employment. This was the social environment in which the *Windrush* children lived and matured. Even if the children were British born, such a social environment could lead to a sense of not belonging within the societies into which they were born.

Levy, in an interview with Susan Alice Fischer, addresses this issue of second-generation belonging, stating, "People have often said to me...don't you feel that you should say you belong somewhere else?" (367-368). Levy, unlike some of her characters, feels a strong attachment to England. She mentioned London being the setting of her novels explaining, "I feel like a Londoner, and I am," further emphasising her sense of belonging to and in the setting of her novels (Levy and Fischer 367). In addition, Levy states that her "sense of belonging doesn't depend on being universally loved or accepted" (Levy and Fischer 368). However, this is a comment made by Levy as an adult. In Levy's novels of identity, childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood are problematic stages of growth, development, and identity formation rather than carefree periods for the second generation. It is during these years that the characters' come to recognise that their race is noticeably different from many of their peers and that this difference sets them apart.

In Andrea Levy's second novel *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996), race proves to be an issue for the protagonist and her sister outside of the home and is further reinforced by colourism within the home. *Nowhere* is the story of two sisters, Olive and Vivien, who grow up together in

council housing<sup>28</sup>. Their parents came from Jamaica in the 1950s, and, by the early 1970s, their father dies of emphysema after years working in England as a bus mechanic. Although they have the same parents, attend the same schools, and live in the same conditions, their lives take divergent trajectories. Olive is a single mother separated from her White English husband by age twenty-one while Vivien takes A-levels and enters an art college at eighteen. Levy toys with the idea that their lives take such contrasting paths because of their complexions. According to younger sister Vivien, “we looked alike...But I had a light skin—a high colour. In a dim light I could be taken for Italian or Spanish. Olive was darker. Black. The Caribbean legacy” (1). Vivien’s comment about “Black” being Olive’s “Caribbean legacy” is interesting as Black chattel slaves were not indigenous to the region. Therefore, it is quite possible that Olive’s darker complexion and Vivien’s fairer complexion are both their inheritances from the Caribbean as a new, ethnically heterogeneous region.

The view of Black or African as a negation and as darker skin tones as the manifestation of undesirability is a recurrent theme in Caribbean literature. For example, in Merle Hodge’s *Crick Crack Monkey* (1970), protagonist Tee is often reminded by her Auntie Beatrice that if not for her father’s genetic contribution to her browner complexion and curly hair, she would look like the family’s White Ancestress, whose picture is positioned on a wall in the living room so that everyone who enters can see it. While in *Crick Crack* race is often addressed with a humorous adolescent discomfort, throughout the novel Black is associated with what Auntie Beatrice terms “ordinaryness” [sic] and “niggeryness” [sic] (Hodge 95). Both traits infer that being Black is something to be resisted rather than embraced. The issue of whether to embrace or

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<sup>28</sup> Council housing is British government housing. The British government provided houses or flats at lower rental rates for people with lower incomes (*Cambridge Dictionaries Online*). As many immigrant families arrived without planned housing, council housing was a logical as well as helpful solution to this issue.

reject 'blackness' divides Olive and Vivien as sisters but could also provide some explanation for Vivien's success and Olive's failure.

Despite the noticeable difference in their appearances, Vivien believes that Olive's life remains unsuccessful at the novel's end because of Olive's choices (Levy *Nowhere* 277). Olive sees their lives differently; she believes that Vivien has had an easier life because she can pass<sup>29</sup> for White, which Vivien does throughout her adolescence. In addition, Olive believes that their parents were physically and verbally abusive to her because she was the dark-skinned child. Vivien has a completely different view of her mother and father's parenting style, believing that their parents ignored her because she never gave them any trouble. When she gets into art college, Vivien realizes that her mother "paid more attention to Olive" because Vivien "was no trouble: [she] just had to get on with it" (Levy *Nowhere* 239). Vivien views Olive as the squeaky wheel; her own existence and problems are secondary to Olive's, but there is a definite racial element to their childhood experiences.

In contemporary sociological studies, race is theorised as a social construct (Hall 18). Societies first develop concepts of race and then use race as a means of dividing members into groups and subgroups. While from the perspective of scholars and researchers race is theoretical and analytical, theory and analysis are meaningless to a child who either experiences racism first hand or lives in constant fear of experiencing racism. For Olive and Vivien, race, racism, and colourism are persistent concerns at home and outside. Olive, as the brown-skinned child, has more direct knowledge of racism because she is noticeably Black. Throughout *Nowhere*, Levy

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<sup>29</sup> Harvard law professor and noted commentator on race, Randall Kennedy, defines passing as "a deception that enables a person to adopt certain roles or identities from which he would be barred by prevailing social standards in the absence of his misleading conduct" (1). Racial passing usually occurs when a person assumes the persona of a race that is not her own. Typically, passing occurs among people of African descent who have complexions fair enough to be taken for members of another race. Racial passing was the subject of Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* (1929) in which protagonist Clare Kendry passes for White and even marries a White man who is extremely prejudiced against Blacks.

implies that Olive's life is not solely comprised of a series of events that could be easily blamed on her personal ineffectuality. Instead, Levy offers other, blended possibilities. Olive may be ineffectual, but she is also an abused child, an unloved daughter, and the victim of social exclusion. Race is a relevant factor in Olive's life because there is a link between these issues and her complexion.

Olive is essentially at the mercy of a light-complexioned mother, Rose Charles, who does not "believe in black people" and who "tried to believe that she was not black" (Levy *Nowhere* 7). Rose's denial of her racial identity is not simply a refusal to accept a social construct; Rose firmly believes that Black or African racial affiliation does not apply to her. The ease with which Rose rejects other Blacks and her perceptions of 'blackness' could as easily be turned on her. It would be relatively easy to interpret Rose as a purveyor of intra-racial prejudice and colourism. However, a closer reading of Rose reveals that she too, like her daughters, exists at a crossroads. Thus, Rose's rejection of a Black Self occurs within the framework of colonisation, immigration, and belonging. Rose is a Jamaican who first lived as a colonial subject in a country that was supported by a plantation-based economy with chattel slaves in its historical past. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the majority Black population remained socially disadvantaged because it was only allowed to achieve minimal success. Social standards in the Caribbean linked complexion to success until independence; rarely was anyone but a European in a position of power or allowed to advance until the post-independence period. In Jamaican society, there was a direct correlation between class and complexion, and this environment shaped Rose's views on race. Given her background, it is understandable why she would view 'black' negatively—so much so that Rose often makes disparaging comments about other immigrants because they are darker complexioned than she. Rose "liked to think that because they [she and her husband] were fair-

skinned they were the only decent people who came. The only ones with ‘a bit of class’” (Levy *Nowhere* 7). However, Rose’s view of class is decidedly skewed as she resides in a working-class area, in council housing.

Literary scholar Matthew Taunton’s research on class in *Nowhere* suggests a correlation between class and the living environment. Taunton believes that Levy’s “novel imagines a subtle and complicated relationship between race, class and the culture of the council estate” (27). While the council estate is relevant because it is the girls’ home environment, its role is not as prominent. Class plays a larger role in *Nowhere* than environment, and Taunton points out that all council estate residents are working class. The Charles family has middle class ambitions; Rose has “aspirations of middle class respectability” which she believes are attached to her complexion (Taunton 31). For her daughters, attaining middle-class status is more straightforward. When Olive first receives her government housing, she is pleased because “[i]t wasn’t on an estate, it was on a street, in Wood Green, in a proper house” (Levy *Nowhere* 231). Although her new home is issued and paid for by the government, its location in a house on a real street makes it closer to middle class than a council estate. When Vivien goes to art college and gets her financial aid cheque for £400, it is “the largest amount of money [she had] ever seen with [her] name attached to it” (Levy *Nowhere* 248). At the bank, Vivien thinks about the fact that no one in her family ever had a bank account (Levy *Nowhere* 249). The fact that no one in the family, which resides in England in the latter-half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, never had a bank account drives the image home of the actual working class. These firsts for Olive and Vivien are rudimentary to an actual middle-class person. In her novels of identity, Levy points out that there are so many ‘nevers’ and ‘firsts’ because there are so many experiences that children are not exposed to living on the council estates. Thus, “the boundaries of the council estate become ‘the

frontier of the class divide” (Taunton 25). However, there is still a significant racial divide as well.

Taunton notes that “[r]acism is one of the results of the separation of estate-dwellers from the rest of the city, not its cause” because he imagines the estate as an ecosystem and racism as “a part of the reality of that ecosystem” (27). Taunton proposes that the council estate is not necessarily a site of racism because unlike the segregated racial makeup of housing projects in US cities such as Chicago and Miami, in the “United Kingdom estates have historically tended to be racially mixed” (26). The racial heterogeneity of the council estates does little to diminish racially-based tension or hostility; the outcome is no different from American housing projects where racial segregation and economic disparities lead to social unrest. While racism on the council estates is the result of an environment in which ignorance quickly descends into prejudice, how these ideas about race and difference develop must also be probed. If all council estate dwellers are working class, there should be no differences. However, racial issues continue to rise because “many of the white working classes, who live in close quarters with black people on the estate, are skinheads and racists” (Taunton 32).

Although class distinctions are non-existent on the council estates, there is some element of the impact of class and its intersections with race within the immigrant experience in *Nowhere*. First and foremost, there is Rose’s attitude toward colour as she believes that she and her husband are the only Jamaicans with a bit of class from the *Windrush* era to arrive in Britain solely because they are light-complexioned. However, what does this idea of class mean to Black Britons—particularly when Britain “currently lacks anything that can be credibly called a black bourgeoisie” (Gilroy *Black Atlantic* 33)? In addition, it seems unlikely that Britain had a viable Black middle class during the *Windrush* era. The presence of a Black elite class also seems

unlikely. While class in *Nowhere* suggests ambitions of attaining middle class status, this goal is impossible given the Charles' family's limited prospects and their working-class background.

While stating that there was “nothing good” about other Afro-Caribbean immigrants in conversations with Olive, Rose also states that Olive is “not white and...not black” because Olive is simply Olive (Levy *Nowhere* 7). Rose also jokes that “Olive is the black sheep of the family” because Olive is darker-complexioned and the family's problem child (Levy *Nowhere* 6). This conversation is just one example of how Olive “grew up confused” about race (Levy *Nowhere* 7). These interactions with her mother also explain why, as an adult, Olive's identity is that of a Black woman; she “wanted to be black” (Levy *Nowhere* 8). Olive concludes that “Being black was not a bad thing, being black was something to be proud of” most likely because of the influence of Black activism and nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s; because she likes “to think about everything”; and despite the negativity involved with being Black in her family and on the council estate, she concludes that Black is not a negation (Levy *Nowhere* 8). In addition, for Olive being Black is “a political statement, not just a fact” (Levy *Nowhere* 8).

Olive is independent and self-sufficient, having no use for false friends; and she is also confident enough not to rely on people who do not care about her. She describes her best friend Maggie as someone who “didn't make jokes about wogs or coons and then say ‘Sorry Olive, I don't mean you, you're all right,’ in some prissy little posh voice” (Levy *Nowhere* 26). While Olive relies on her mother, Vivien's boyfriend Eddie, her estranged husband Peter, and the state for support, there is also a fierce independence about her. She is strong enough to walk into social services and not ask but demand everything that she needs. At the end of the novel, Olive, who rarely sets foot off the council estates much less out of London, decides to immigrate to Jamaica because she believes, rather naively, that she belongs in Jamaica because she is Black

(Levy *Nowhere* 280). While this plan is misguided, there is still some element of strength involved in a young, uneducated single mother deciding to pack up her belongings and move to another country with a small child where she knows no one and is not familiar with the living conditions. Levy seems to challenge the notion that Olive, the dark-skinned child, could be weakened by an environment that negated her existence because of her complexion. Instead, Olive gained strength from that environment whereas Vivien, the loved child, was weakened by an environment that in some ways glorified her light complexion.

While Vivien's interactions with her mother are minimal in the novel, she does come face-to-face with people in social situations in which race is very relevant and quite problematic for her as an adolescent Black Briton in the 1970s. Unlike Olive who wholeheartedly believes that her Black identity is a political statement rather than a judgment on her, Vivien seems caught between two opposing lives because she is the child with the lighter complexion; her skin is both a blessing and a curse, causing her to become entangled in situations and with people that she would be safer avoiding. For example, at fourteen, Vivien seems to have no will of her own and accompanies her friend Carol to join a local youth club. Vivien describes Carol as "English, a working-class Londoner, her family going back generations, all brought up on the same street" (Levy *Nowhere* 10). In this description of Carol, Levy exposes the narrow view and prospects of the British working class. Carol wants to go to the youth club because she is "mad about boys" and, because they attend an all-girls school, the youth club is one of the few places that she can meet boys (Levy *Nowhere* 11). However, the issue with the youth club is that many of the attendees are racists, and, despite Vivien's repeated attempts at passing, she is still Black.

When they enter the game room, Vivien immediately concludes that the club's young members are "all skinheads" but Carol counters with a rather weak "They're not" (Levy

*Nowhere* 14). However, Vivien, who admits that she “hated skinheads,” is not convinced by Carol’s argument that some of them are “crombie<sup>30</sup>” because “They’ve got long hair,” particularly as the differences between crombies and skinheads regarding their treatment of minorities is negligible (*Levy Nowhere* 14). Despite her misgivings and the apparent danger of a Black adolescent entering a youth club peopled by poorly-educated, working-class racists, Vivien remains at the club with Carol. In time, Vivien and Carol become *de facto* skinheads; they start “hanging around” with the group on a regular basis (*Levy Nowhere* 27). Vivien and Carol spend so much time in the company of this gang that outsiders, and the male gang members, assume that they sexually ‘belong’ to the male members. When “a black boy dressed in a mohair suit and a Ben Sherman” flirts with Vivien in a basement club, this innocent act leads to violence (*Levy Nowhere* 91). Vivien dares to exchange a few words with a “wog” and “Johnny [gang member] couldn’t stand that coon talking to one of his women” (*Levy Nowhere* 94). This scene shows how closely entwined Vivien, a Black adolescent, becomes with this gang of skinheads. Vivien never defends or asserts herself; such a weak, female character is an affront to the feminist movement of the early 1970s when the novel is set. Perhaps Levy uses Vivien’s weakness to demonstrate how easy it is for someone who looks like Vivien and lives in a racially-intolerant environment to become swept up by groups such as these because she lacks the strength and conviction of someone like Olive. Olive seems to have developed a tough, strong exterior because her racist environment dictated this response whereas Vivien, who did not experience racial discrimination like Olive, could afford to be weak—unable to assert her identity and defend it.

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<sup>30</sup> A Crombie is a coat produced by J&J Crombie Ltd., which was founded by John Crombie and his son James in Scotland. The coats are known for their sturdiness, often lasting for decades. In the late 1960s to early 1970s, Crombie coats became skinhead couture. According to Nick Foulkes of *The Telegraph*, the Crombie will now be a permanent part of Doctor Who’s wardrobe. For more information, see Robert Elms *The Way We Wore It* (2005).

The racism that Olive and Vivien experience cannot be reduced to the essentialist and antagonist position of White versus Black because each event is not isolated but built on a series of historical occurrences, misunderstandings, and hostility. For Vivien, being Black is not simply about her complexion; it is an identity that she cannot claim if she wants to remain safe, or, more likely, if she wants to belong. Olive, on the other hand, never denies who she is whether claiming that Self leads to social exclusion. She openly acknowledges her Black identity, wearing it with a sort of pride that is unusual given her home life and working-class, council estate environment. Ultimately, Olive observes that “in England people like [Vivien] are never far from nowhere” because they refuse to accept who they are (Levy *Nowhere* 273). In *Never Far from Nowhere*, Levy explores why race cannot be avoided as avoidance does not make minimise the issue—particularly in a country that is hostile to non-Whites.

In *Never Far from Nowhere*, Levy uses colourism in the Charles family to demonstrate that biases are complex. She challenges her audience to recognise how damaging misguided notions about complexion can be. While Olive, the dark-complexioned child, struggles to climb out of the working class while embracing her Black heritage, Vivien, the successful, light-complexioned child, ties herself to a racist group to avoid her Black heritage. Olive acts as Vivien’s foil, and, through her, Levy gives backchat to the family’s and the working-class environment’s sensibilities about race, asking her audience to examine why complexion is so critical given that both sisters are Black. Levy’s decision to complicate Olive’s life while seeming to simplify Vivien’s is not straightforward. Rather, Levy wills her audience to observe that both women’s lives are complicated by race, complexion notwithstanding. Levy seems to conclude with the position that Olive and Vivien are Black Britons, and this national identity defines who they are more than any other designation.

In Levy's first novel, *Every Light in the House Burnin'*, she explores the issue of national identity and the impact of exclusion on immigrant Britons. Within this theme is the topic of second generation Black Britons helplessly watching the systemic exclusion of their immigrant parents—particularly in social services. Levy seems to point out that the intrusion of the state into the private sphere is typically problematic for immigrants; while help is needed, the quantity and quality of that aid is questioned. In addition, immigrant stories are rarely related; Levy attempts to record this history in *Every Light*, recounting another side of immigration and long-term residency that may not be included in typical immigrant narratives. Levy stated in an interview with Fischer, “[m]y dad dying was the impetus [to begin writing]. He died in 1987, and I think I just wanted to make him visible, record something of his life, and also the experience that we’d gone through with it” (362). Because of the similarities between Levy’s father’s experiences and those of her character Winston Jacobs, there may be some elements of the events surrounding her father’s illness and death in the novel. The novel’s protagonist, Angela Jacobs helps her parents navigate the healthcare portion of social services so that her father, Winston, can receive proper treatment. However, Angela soon learns that although British nationality is her birth right and entitles her to access to state-supported benefits such as medical treatment, her father, who has literally given his adult life to rebuilding England post-WWII, is not in the same position. Legally, as a British resident he is eligible for access to treatment from the National Health Service (NHS); however, the repeated negligence, or perhaps mismanagement, with which his case is handled by doctors, nurses, hospital staff, and even a hospice reveal that people like Winston Jacobs, Black immigrants, are not necessarily included in England’s vision of itself, which is of a racially homogenous nation with colonies of ‘darker’ people at a great distance and as a benevolent society that places the needs of its citizens first.

Immigrants, while legally entitled to state-funded healthcare services, are systematically excluded from effective access to the country's national benefits through carelessness and neglect. The mismanagement of these first-generation Britons by the NHS raises the question of what their British-born children can do to help resolve these issues with social services—particularly in situations in which all that is lacking is empathy for the patient.

Literary theorist Maria Helena Lima, in examining the status of Caribbean immigrants from the *Windrush* era, notes that they were “British citizens holding British passports,” which reaffirms many of the comments about nationality and citizenship made by interviewees in Phillips and Phillips *Windrush* history (59). The common perception of immigrants as people who came to deprive locals of jobs is a consistent theme in anti-immigration movements. However, Lima states that the Caribbean immigrants of the *Windrush* era were “actively recruited to work, through advertisements placed in West Indian newspapers by London Transport, the British Hotels and Restaurants Associations, the NHS, and similar organisations” (59). In addition, Lima confirms that these Caribbean immigrant workers “came to work in jobs traditionally of low status and low pay” (59). The active recruitment of immigrants suggests many jobs but few workers; immigrants did not deprive locals of jobs. The positions often required a minimal skillset and could be described as ‘dirty’; typically, immigrants take jobs that locals refuse to work, which further stigmatises immigrants as people who are willing to do anything for money. An example of immigrants doing the ‘dirty’ jobs that locals refuse occurs in *Never Far from Nowhere*. Newton Charles, the father who appears only briefly in the novel, becomes a bus mechanic. Newton considered this job a step up from his previous position of ticket collector because “[i]t’s a skilled job...a training” (Levy *Nowhere* 2). However, it is also this job and the brake linings he replaced daily that made him come “home stinking of petrol

with his navy overalls black with oil up to the chest” and led to his death from emphysema (Levy *Nowhere* 2). Olive describes her father as “sitting in a chair all day and coughing” and that his eventual death “was the best thing really. Sad of course, but...” (Levy *Nowhere* 38).

While *Nowhere* only addresses social services in Olive’s life, the novel implies that services are limited. Olive’s experiences with social services are often ineffective and seem to create a holding pattern from which aid recipients can never hope to escape. In the novel *In the Ditch* (1972), the late Buchi Emecheta describes a similar situation through the protagonist Adah, an educated Nigerian immigrant, who realises that by accepting social services, she is entwined in a cycle of reliance on the system rather than on herself, which she did at the beginning of the novel. The issue with social services in *Every Light* is that the Jacobs family as a unit, but specifically Winston, need social services to work effectively because the experience of Winston’s illness is new. The family has rarely dealt with NHS, doctors, hospitals, or hospice services since their arrival in Britain. A doctor comes to the house once when Angela is ill; she is hospitalised and receives the required care. With Winston, the situation is completely different perhaps because he is an older, adult Black male. It is in this complex and maze-like system that Levy seems to suggest that while older, Black immigrant men like Winston may be legally entitled to receive healthcare benefits, the people who administer this system may not be maintaining it in a way that adequately serves the entire public. In addition, there are probably some differences between the healthcare that urban and suburban Britons receive from NHS; urban settings are more crowded than suburban, meaning that services are stretched farther in cities than in the suburbs. Winston is one of a million faces in his area of London, but perhaps in a less-populated area he might have received better care because the facilities and staff would have been able to manage the influx of patients. However, there is also a possibility that Winston

would not have fared better in any part of the country given the national anti-immigrant sentiment persisting well into the 1980s.

In Winston's interactions with people in the healthcare system, there are indications that his care is inadequate because he is an older, Black immigrant and because this system is overtaxed. Theorist Robert Moore notes that in densely-populated areas like London, "The presence of *black* and *visible* immigrants showed...problems that had already existed and for which the immigrants themselves were not to blame" (19). Inadequate healthcare was one of those issues (Moore 19). Blame for the overtaxed system was disproportionately assigned to Black immigrants because they appeared to rely on it more than other groups, such as White Britons. Winston's care, which is already compromised because the system is overburdened, is also at risk because of his age. Sister Tooke, the ward sister at the hospital where Winston is being treated, refers to him as "Old man Jacobs," stating that "[h]e gets confused – take no notice" because the elderly "get like that" (Levy *Every Light* 152-153). This dismissive attitude could suggest Sister Tooke's inclination to exhibit ageism. Caregivers like Sister Tooke may view patients like Winston as irredeemable because of age and the advanced nature of his condition. Yet, Angela's parents turn to her, hoping to resolve these issues. Through Angela's frustrating interactions with social services, Levy challenges the position that immigrants like Winston are not entitled to social services because, despite decades of hard work and contributions, they are not Britons.

In the novel's opening, Angela the protagonist gives a brief history of her family in England, beginning with Winston's arrival on the *Empire Windrush*, but this family history is limited as Winston and Beryl gave their children little information about their previous lives in Jamaica. Perfect posits that "Beryl and Winston's reluctance to say anything to anybody about

their lives in Jamaica is largely the consequence of their being made to feel [like] outsiders in Britain” (33). By choosing this seminal voyage to start their family’s history in Britain, Levy is commemorating her own father’s life as well as the lives of the unnamed Caribbean men who came over during the *Windrush* era and whose stories were lost. Levy is speaking for those immigrants who kept “as quiet as possible” for the duration of their lives in Britain (Levy *Every Light* 88).

The novel moves back and forth in Jacobs’ family history, ending in the present. Winston Jacobs, who often appears as larger than life in his youth, is reduced to a swollen, shell of his former self as his wife and youngest child watch. Angela is the youngest in her family and the only child who seems to be in proximity to her parents; she becomes her parents’ advocate by default. It seems that Winston and Beryl, his wife and Angela’s mother, are unable to speak for themselves perhaps because in their years in England they have either strived to avoid notice or because their experiences as immigrants taught them that they will not be heard. They are not inarticulate; rather, they rightly assume that they are being pushed aside or outright ignored.

In an interview with Blake Morrison, Levy describes how children often feel the need to interpret and explain this new environment to their immigrant parents; this new world is theirs and they understand how to navigate it in a way that their parents cannot. In *Every Light*, Winston tells his sister and Scottish brother-in-law visiting from Jamaica that although they are “coloured” they “don’t have any trouble” because they “just keep” to themselves (Levy *Every Light* 126). This was probably the technique of many Caribbean immigrants in Britain who faced discrimination: silence and avoidance. In the interview, Levy stated, “I always got the feeling of my parents being uneasy in this society, uneasy and not quite understanding” (Morrison 329). She then explained, “sometimes I had to parent them because I understood where I lived and the

people I lived amongst, more than they did” (Levy and Morrison 329). In *Every Light*, Angela interprets her world for her parents because although they capable and Beryl is a college graduate, both parents are constantly being patronised by the people who are assigned to help them.

Winston’s illness progresses quickly, and within a week of visiting the doctor with Angela, Beryl reveals his diagnosis of terminal cancer. In addition, Winston develops shingles and his doctor gives him Paracetamol for the pain. Already, Winston’s leg is weak and dragging; he has gained a considerable amount of weight from prescription steroids; and he is physically weakening daily in addition to the pain he is experiencing from the shingles. While acetaminophen is an acceptable pain reducer for shingles, it can also be paired with a topical antibiotic to prevent infection of the blisters (Shingles – Medications”). The NHS website, which advises against topical antibiotics, states that painkillers, such as Paracetamol, can be used in combination with a prescribed antiviral medication (“Shingles – Treatment”). NHS lists three antiviral medications currently available to treat shingles: acyclovir, valcyclovir, and famcyclovir (“Shingles – Treatment”). Acyclovir was available in ointment and injection forms in 1982 (eMedExpert “Acyclovir in Brief”). If *Every Light* is contemporaneous to the passing of Levy’s father in 1987 or to the novel’s publishing in 1994, there were prescription medications available in the UK that might have eased Winston’s discomfort and cured his shingles rash.

This unwillingness to treat the patient with the most recent medications is either a demonstration of this doctor’s ineptitude or carelessness; later, Angela finds the latter to be true. It does not take Angela long to realise that the medication is useless; she resolves to help, accepting the “burden” of navigating the health care services for her father (Levy *Every Light* 88). Angela admits that she “knew this society better than [her] parents” whose “strategy was to

keep as quiet as possible in the hope that no one would know that they had sneaked into this country” (Levy *Every Light* 88). Levy uses this incident of Winston being denied effective medication to sum up the position of many immigrants who may never lose the feeling of being intruders in someone else’s country, even after years of residence. This feeling of being an interloper notwithstanding, Winston is entitled to health care and what he receives clearly demonstrates that he is entangled in a system that is not willing to help him because the people who manage it cannot or will not.

Winston and Beryl’s need to isolate themselves after enduring decades of mistreatment is not transferred to Angela, who is very comfortable as an adult in England. When Angela offers to help her parents navigate the health care system, she does this with full confidence because she “had grown up in its English ways” and “could confront it, rail against it, fight it, because it was” her “birthright” (Levy *Every Light* 88). There are some situations in which her British national identity and the confidence of occupying that identity serve her and her parents well. When Angela goes to see Winston’s doctor about getting him a stronger prescription, she finds that her father’s well-dressed doctor is not amenable to helping her father manage his pain or face death with dignity unless she presses him. She quickly observes that the doctor is willing to dismiss her concerns because he sees a Black woman sitting before him; that Angela is Winston’s daughter and he needs advanced medical care are secondary concerns. However, it is Angela’s strength and confidence as a Briton that allow her to challenge this doctor who makes excuses not to help her father. Eventually, the doctor prescribes a stronger medication when she persists after initially vaguely stating that he could not give anything stronger because “it’s very difficult” (Levy *Every Light* 91). Most people would give up in the face of a strong personality—particularly as “doctors frightened” her—but Angela refuses to give up for the sake of her father

(Levy *Every Light* 88). Levy challenges her readers to consider the following question: Which Britons deserve proper health care? Angela, much like Vivien in *Nowhere*, believes wholeheartedly that her parents contributed to building Britain. As such, adequate healthcare should be their right as British citizens not a privilege.

Repeatedly, Angela is in the awkward position of confronting so-called caregivers who refuse to recognise her father's right to healthcare as a citizen but also his right to a dignified life. Winston, who was such a proud man before his cancer advanced, is reduced and humiliated by his body's betrayal on different occasions. When Angela visits him in the hospital, Winston needs to be helped to the toilet. After a bout of constipation probably brought on by his steroid prescription necessitates Winston a laxative. The details of his body's failings are hard enough for him to bear, but Winston must also share this information with his youngest child—his daughter—so that she can get him immediate assistance. He tries to hold his bowels as Angela makes trip after trip to the nurse's station to ask for help. When the male nurse finally arrives, he instructs Winston to "Let it come" on the chair (Levy *Every Light* 150). All that Winston can do is to lift his nightshirt and release his bowels where he is as Angela mourns the loss of her father's dignity. A once-proud man is reduced to a shadow of himself and the most poignant element of this scene is Winston's awareness of his dignity being stripped from him. That scene cannot help but raise a question: If Winston had been a 'real' Briton, would he have been treated in that manner?

Levy gives other examples of the indignities suffered in the health care system by non-White patients who are not considered Britons. During Winston's last hospital stay, he is in a ward with other male patients. All that preserves Winston's dignity is an orange curtain draped around his bed. Winston, who is in the advanced stages of cancer, must be catheterised because

his bladder is no longer functioning. When Angela arrives at the hospital, Beryl is with Winston surrounded by the curtain. He is screaming in pain but a poor attempt has been made to manage his pain. Winston's illness has advanced, and he cannot swallow the pills. When Angela leaves their "little tent" to call a nurse, she finds the medical staff unwilling to help (Levy *Every Light* 242). Angela tells the nurse that Winston is in pain, but the nurse replies, "Well, we've tried to give him something, but he won't take it" (Levy *Every Light* 242). The nurse clarifies that Winston "spat them out" and suggests that Angela speak to the doctor (Levy *Every Light* 242). This level of cruelty is unconscionable given images of nurses as angels of mercy. There is no mercy in listening to a dying man scream in pain, which could have been eased with an intravenous dose of morphine or any other opiate, and there is nothing angelic about failing to ease a patient's suffering. While waiting, Angela hears Winston screaming and questions, "Why couldn't he die gracefully, with dignity?" (Levy *Every Light* 242). Dylan Thomas wrote, "Old age should burn and rave at close of day;/Rage, rage against the dying of the light" (lines 2-3). As he lays dying, Winston rages against the end in a way that he never fought in life—particularly while living in England and trying not to be seen. There is considerable irony in this scene in which the *Empire Windrush* immigrant who spent his life quietly in the shadows no longer cares whether he is silently hidden. Levy brings this *Windrush* immigrant narrative to an inglorious end that ignores the dignity of Winston's life but questions an anti-immigration national sentiment that powerful enough to impact basic healthcare services.

In *Every Light in the House Burnin'*, Levy challenges the idea of national identity, asking what makes a Briton and which Britons are worthy of healthcare. Through Winston's entanglement with social services, Levy concludes that whether immigrants contribute to nation-building they are at risk of being excluded from obtaining needed services. Perhaps the most

poignant scene in *Every Light* is the day before Winston's death when he is screaming, nurses are wilfully ignoring him, and Angela is praying for a dignified end to her father's life. Levy uses this painful scene to give backchat. In this scene, Levy challenges a broken system that may have ignored her father's needs but may be guilty of failing to treat other non-White immigrants from throughout the former Empire. She forces her audience to focus its attention on the lack of humanity Winston and others like him may face in Britain's' NHS but perhaps also in other Western nations with large immigrant populations and overtaxed public healthcare systems. *Every Light* is a bold request to reach out to immigrant populations who are struggling to incorporate themselves into societies that have absorbed their locally-born children.

Moore found that in the early 1960s, there were efforts by the Labour MPs to restrict "black immigration" to Britain (23). There is little doubt that these efforts symbolised the nation's move to codify racism, yet there are also basic motivations involved. Moore notes that this move was a response to grassroots movements among Labour Party constituents (23). Factors, such as the fear of other cultures, represented by dark skin, worked within these discriminatory laws. Black Caribbean immigration created a White-Briton backlash largely among the working-class but not isolated to this group. There was an element of cultural purity through isolation behind British anti-immigration policies. According to psychiatrist Susham Gupta and mental health theorist Dinesh Bhugra, cultural identity is a combination of "social characteristics that are shared within a certain group," highlighting "a person's uniqueness and could include, for example, gender, ethnicity and occupation" (333). However, historian Eric S. Gruen takes a more linear view of cultural identity, defining it as the "affirmation of ethnic, racial, or religious roots" (1). In the *Windrush* children's Britain, race, national identity, and cultural identity were intertwined, reflecting a political discourse from the 1960s to the 1990s

fuelled by the Conservative Party under the leadership of politicians such as Enoch Powell and Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013). Cultural identity is fluid; while cultural groups have certain fixed codes, other cultural codes are in a constant state of flux subject to social, economic, or other influences. Caribbean cultures exemplify this concept of cultural flux; for five centuries, the region experienced social and economic changes resulting initially from colonisation and more recently from decolonisation. Therefore, it is not surprising that the children born in the Caribbean Diaspora would experience some cultural ambiguity. In *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), Levy explores the concept of cultural identity in the *Windrush* children. Perhaps some White Britons believe that *Windrush* children are not culturally British because they are the children of Black immigrants and because those immigrants continue to live on the margins of British society. Pérez Fernández writes that second-generation characters “may not have undertaken a diasporic journey, but—due to the fact that they inhabit a border space, a hybrid space, a third space (Bhabha 1990)—they are also located in a ‘diaspora space’” (155). The presence of this hybrid space opens the discussion on multiculturalism. In addition, while multiculturalism is a relatively recent field, the actuality of being multicultural is not.

Levy’s *Fruit* suggests that *Windrush* children can be multicultural, identifying with both British and Caribbean cultures. Belonging to both is possible as cultural identity does not have to be an all or nothing endeavour. The novel’s protagonist, Faith Jackson, is second generation—the daughter of immigrants who arrived on a banana boat from Jamaica, albeit not as Faith imagines them travelling “curled up on the floor of a ship, wrapped in a blanket perhaps, trying to find a comfortable spot amongst the spiky prongs of unripe bananas” (Levy *Fruit* 4). Faith feels like a Briton, including memories of an English childhood home, which is “a flat in Stoke Newington” (Levy *Fruit* 10). However, a series of racially-discriminatory events occur,

challenging her ideas about what it means to be British. In this midst of the turmoil caused by these events, Faith learns what it means to be Caribbean—to have a family, a history, and a culture that are in many ways enmeshed but also independent of Britain and Empire.

As a child, Faith experiences the juvenile taunts common among *Windrush* children. In school, “the bully boys...with unruly hair, short trousers and dimpled knees that went bright red in the cold,” tease her by saying “Faith is a darkie and her mum and dad came on a banana boat” (Levy *Fruit* 3). Music and movement class is no different from history as when they sang the lines “Hey mister tallyman, tally me banana” from “The Banana Boat Song” (1956), not only were they singing the lyrics incorrectly as the lyric is “Come mister tallyman,” but the “song made the boys nudge each other, point at [Faith] and giggle behind their hands when the teacher wasn’t looking” (Levy *Fruit* 3). Levy implies that from childhood, Faith is indoctrinated with the idea that she is different—something sets her apart from the other children. Faith’s awareness of her difference is heightened when she must “write essays telling the facts—how the slaves were captured and transported from Africa to the New World” (Levy *Fruit* 4). Faith “hated those lessons” because, “[a]lthough there were no small boys laughing and pointing, [she] felt them” (Levy *Fruit* 4). It is true that Faith looks differently from those boys, but no other difference separates her from them. After all, it is not as if the boys are identical. Levy asks her audience to consider: What makes Faith and other second-generation Britons so different from other, supposedly, ‘normal’ Britons?

In art college, this issue comes up again when Faith is told that her work has “an ethnicity which shines through,” and Faith “could only suppose that [she] had some sort of collective unconscious that was coming through from [her] slave ancestry” (Levy *Fruit* 31). As Faith grew up in Haringey, her tutor’s comments are questionable as the only difference between Faith and

the other students is that they are White and she is not. There is nothing to culturally distinguish Faith from the other students. Faith gets a job offer from that exhibition of her final project, which she rightly believes is because she “was just better than everyone else” (Levy *Fruit* 31). However, Faith loses this first job because she is young and inexperienced, not with work but with life, and walks in on her boss “standing by the door wearing a silk kimono, kissing a man whose hands were wriggling inside the wrap of the fabric” (Levy *Fruit* 32). While a more mature employee would have dismissed this little scene, Faith is awkward, unable to look her boss in the face, so her boss “after suffering [Faith’s] embarrassed mute sullenness for a week, packed up two weeks’ wages in a window envelop and sacked [her]” (Levy *Fruit* 33). While the question of Faith’s family background is not raised in the novel regarding this scene, it could be argued that Faith, who is the daughter of Caribbean parents, is probably more conservative than she is willing to admit. Faith is only twenty-two at the time this incident occurs and has always lived at home in what could be described as a sheltered environment. In addition, she has been taught to respect elders and people in authority, like a supervisor. Therefore, Faith’s reaction is logical but so is her supervisor’s decision to release her in response. Culturally, Faith’s reaction is more than acceptable; it is expected.

In the novel, there are many incidents that involve race more than cultural identity, demonstrating that for the *Windrush* children, race implied difference and they were often socially isolated because of this difference. However, the issues with cultural misunderstandings thread through the novel, which is divided in two parts: England and Jamaica. When Faith is in England, she seems out of step with her social environment. Jobs in her chosen profession come to her with ease, but the racism she encounters in these settings hinder her success because they have a psychological impact. In the centre of the novel, Faith arrives on the scene immediately

after a hate crime is committed by the National Front<sup>31</sup>, and while the crime upsets her it is the fact that her three White English roommates, one of whom witnesses the attack, seem so blasé about the event. As Simon recounts the attack to Marion and Mick with Faith present, Faith notices that he repeatedly neglects to mention that the victim was Black. Faith interrupts the story to interject that the “woman was Black” (Levy *Fruit* 156). As the three laugh, Faith remembers that “Carl once came home with bruises” that “took weeks to heal” (Levy *Fruit* 157). Slowly, Faith connects the National Front attack on the Black woman at the bookstore with Carl’s bruises and a national culture that condones racism and racially-based violence. This realisation annoys or perhaps frustrates Faith. She pours her cup of tea on the table; says “Just fucking shut up. It’s not funny!”; and leaves the house (Levy *Fruit* 158).

Immediately before Faith loses her patience, her roommates joke that Simon “better wear a mask” or “a white sheet with a hood” to avoid becoming a target of the National Front for identifying the assailants and possibly testifying against them (Levy *Fruit* 158). This scene is very telling about what is culturally acceptable, demonstrating that “the British culture [Faith] and her own family have tried so hard to fit into ultimately demeans and excludes someone like her” (Gui 83). For Faith’s roommates, Yemi, the Black woman who was attacked, is not as important as Simon, the young White man who witnessed the attack. They know him but not the victim. However, they know Faith, but they are they not inquiring about her health or wellbeing after witnessing this violent incident. Faith does not want attention, but they refuse to acknowledge that being close to this event might have a psychological and emotional impact on her.

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<sup>31</sup> The National Front is a British nationalist party that supports many causes but is best known for its anti-immigration, repatriation of non-White migrant stance. Active since the late 1960s, the National Front has gone through periods of popularity but has lost ground in the past two decades due to in-fighting and factionalism. For more information, see the National Front website at [britishnationalfront.net/](http://britishnationalfront.net/).

There is a culturally-enforced neglectful attitude born of racial and national superiority evident in this interaction between the roommates. Levy's novels of identity could be recognised as portraying "British society as a hybrid location where traditional conceptions of what constitutes a national identity are continuously challenged by the heterogeneity that is to be found in the myriad of characters depicted" (Pérez Fernández 156). Faith and her roommates Simon, Mick, and Marion represent that heterogeneity, but it is Faith who challenges the concept of a homogenous British national identity. The three White British roommates can laugh and joke because, ultimately, they know that this hate crime is not their problem. For Faith as a Black woman living in this environment, the attack is symbolically her cross to bear. While throughout the novel Faith is still culturally a Briton, in this scene in which she expresses concern for another Black person demonstrates that there are some cultural differences separating Faith from the White Britons in her age group. Their racial affiliation and national identity mesh; they represent a new form of White liberalism that is, supposedly, accepting of the Other, but is also their greatest flaw. White liberalism in any state, while sympathetic to the 'plight of the Other', remains distanced from actual Others. In the scene at the kitchen table, this issue is obvious. The White roommates make jokes about the attack, not wanting to notice that Faith is Black and, as a witness, she is probably upset as well. Ignoring the effect of this event on Faith takes a more personal turn as Marion, Faith's best friend, makes a point of being overly comforting to their roommate Simon, who recently expressed some romantic interest in Faith. This is Marion's typical pattern of behaviour, and she did this to Faith before. Still, Faith has been through a traumatic experience and Marion professes to be her friend and has been since childhood. Between the joking, ignoring Faith, and avoiding the fact that seeing another Black woman attacked might impact Faith, sends her spiralling into a mini nervous breakdown. Perfect

accurately assesses that “it is silencing, denial and erasure that are ultimately responsible for bringing Faith’s crisis of identity” to culminate into a nervous breakdown (35).

Faith’s parents decide to send her to Jamaica for a vacation, but Faith asks “[w]hat’s wrong with Spain or something” (Levy *Fruit* 162). However, her parents insist that she go to Jamaica “[b]ecause it might help” her and, more relevantly, because “everyone should know where they come from” (Levy *Fruit* 162). Faith has no connection to Jamaica, which is the result of her parents’ refusal to discuss their lives at ‘home’ in detail. Perfect focuses on one element of the novel—that of Faith collecting her family history in “little scraps...until [she] had a story that seemed to make sense” (Levy *Fruit* 4). By erasing their lives in Jamaica, Faith’s parents avoided giving Faith a connection to their home and their identity as Jamaicans. Faith is hindered from success and achievement because she is alienated from British society and disconnected from Jamaican and/or Caribbean culture. Mildred and Wade innocently assumed that England would automatically be home to their children because they were born there, and it is. In fact, when Faith learns early in the novel that her parents are thinking of returning to Jamaica to retire, “she is angry and utterly baffled” which is “a reaction symptomatic of the degree to which she thinks of it as a place of no relevance whatsoever to her” (Perfect 34-35). However, because of Faith’s rootlessness and the trauma she suffered, she needs a cultural attachment to Jamaica to help her recover and come to some conclusion about who she is so that wherever she chooses to live she can thrive. Visiting Jamaica helps Faith to form a closer connection to Britain and Jamaica, which, based on the final lines of the novel, suggest that her family’s history comes full circle. Like her parents, she is coming to Britain a fully-formed adult with a strong sense of identity.

Faith’s welcome to the “island [her] parents had left thirty years before. The place in the photographs in [their] tatty brown album” was a dichotomy of unnerving and comforting (Levy

*Fruit* 168). Initially, she is harassed by a con man in the airport who takes \$5 US from her in exchange for finding her luggage. The baggage search is a common hustle in many Caribbean airports. He disappears in crowd but only after “[h]e kept touching [her] arm, [her] shoulder, grabbing [her] wrist” and following her—all actions meant to intimidate single female travellers into paying simply to be left alone (Levy *Fruit* 170). Faith is noticeably shaken by this experience that is slightly reminiscent of Yemi’s attack at the bookstore. Then, she is comforted by a Jamaican woman from the same flight named Sugar, who talks to Faith and helps her navigate airport bureaucracy. Sugar acts as a foil to the thief; kindness in contrast to cruelty. Faith is concerned that no one will meet her at the airport or that she will go with the wrong people. As she does not know her family, she imagines,

Any Jamaican family could have claimed [her] and taken [her] home to talk about [her] mum and dad and what had happened to them in the ‘Mother Country’. And [her] hosts would know it as a familiar story [not realizing for days that they] were not, after all kin (Levy *Fruit* 175).

In Faith’s migration to Jamaica, Levy delves into another reality of immigration: families could be separated for decades with another generation born and maturing without ever knowing members of the previous generation. If history is not passed through memories to the next generation, immigrants cannot pass cultural connections onto their children. This is a question that Levy poses in the second half of the novel, appropriately titled “Jamaica.”

When Faith first meets her family at the airport, her aunt Coral states, “Mildred’s daughter—little Mildred’s daughter—I never thought I’d see the day” (Levy *Fruit* 176). In that brief statement, Coral establishes Mildred’s former role in the family: that of the little sister. In addition, through Coral Levy expresses the sentiments of the family members left behind; often,

they did not expect to see their immigrant relatives again—particularly those who migrated to Britain. Coral probably felt that when her little sister Mildred and brother-in-law Wade immigrated to England, the distance meant they were, essentially, lost to their families back home. While it is difficult to imagine a time when telephones were scarce and traveling was limited to the very wealthy, such a time did exist in the recent past and these facts comprise a portion of the *Windrush* immigrant’s life and reality.

As previously mentioned, some *Windrush*-era immigrants planned to be in the UK only for a time; they either came for employment or education with the intent of returning home. St. Lucian Ben Bousquet stated in an interview, “I think what most West Indians who came to England in the fifties made of the England which they came was this: We’ve come here, we will work a while, we’ll save some money and we’ll go back home” (Phillips and Phillips 140). However, Bousquet also mentioned that many did not return because time passed, they changed, and those who did return home found that ‘home’ was no longer the place they left (Phillips and Phillips 140). The *Windrush* children lived another reality; they knew no other home because many of them, like Faith, had no “oral tradition” in their families creating a lasting historical fissure into which the past sank (Levy *Fruit* 4). This is the fissure that Mildred and Wade hope to close by sending Faith ‘home’ to Jamaica but especially into Coral’s care. They may want Coral to tell the stories that for twenty-two years they failed to share with Faith so that she can develop a stronger sense of self that includes awareness of her Jamaican heritage.

Perfect concludes that “[w]hile Faith’s trip doesn’t make her feel that she herself actually ‘comes from’ Jamaica, her time there does allow her to discover a great deal about her ancestry” (36). In discovering that she descends from a long, rich family history, both maternally and paternally, Faith understands more about herself and close the family’s historical fissure. Faith

learns that immigrants are not simply ‘people without countries’; they have origins, pasts, and are connected to a place other than the country in which they live. Literary theorist Weihsin Gui writes that Andrea Levy revises “migrancy as a literary intervention into contemporary literary British discourses of cultural heritage” (73). This is a critical step in the contemporary British novel because historically, migrants’ stories were not recorded in fiction or nonfiction, creating an impression of migrants as rootless. However, Levy’s novels, which Gui refers to as “post-heritage narratives,” not only act as “a counterpoint to heritage discourse” favouring the dominant or host culture, but offer “a migrant or transnational perspective that illuminates the fetishization of such heritage and the essentialist and racist assumptions underlying the heritage industry” (74). Levy transforms “the migrant Caribbean experience” from an exotic difference “into a cultural critique of late twentieth-century Britain’s patriotic narratives of cultural heritage” (Gui 77). This critique of cultural heritage is critical to the second generation, especially those like Faith who believe that their parents are rootless, without a history, and that their lives ‘began’ when they immigrated to the UK.

To emphasise more of the family history and cultural heritage, Levy titles each subsection of the historical accounts in the “Jamaica” section of the novel based on the names of the storyteller and the subject. For example, the first story is of her maternal grandfather, William, and is titled “William’s Story Told to Me by Coral” (Levy *Fruit* 239). As this portion of the novel progresses, a family tree is constructed, filling in more details as each, individual story is told. John McLeod concludes that the “family tree which grows as the novel proceeds schematises the various global connections (including Europe, American, the Caribbean) that culminate in her cultural heritage and her modest selfhood” (49). The image of the family tree in each subsection represents the construction of Faith’s family, one person at a time, until not only

the picture of the tree but the family is complete. This is the same way that Faith constructs her family history initially by collecting the minor details that her mother Mildred provided “until [she] had a story that seemed to make sense” (Levy *Fruit* 4). However, in the “Jamaica” section the stories are told with such detail that there is no need to piece together the information; it is all provided and freely given contrary to Mildred and Wade’s hesitation to share the past. In this gathering of family historical details, Faith learns that, contrary her original ideas of her parents’ arrival in England being like slaves packed on a ship like cargo, her family history cannot be so easily reduced to the colonial essentialist notion of the ‘immigrant islander’.

Faith learns that while slavery provided the basis for founding of both sides of her family, so did ancestors from Europe who married free Blacks and former slaves. She learns that in her mother’s generation, she has a cousin who looks completely European. This *mélange* of family members and the complicated roles they occupy in the family history gives Faith a clearer idea of who she is so that at the very end of the novel before she leaves Jamaica to return ‘home’ to England on Guy Fawkes night, she proudly claims her identity as the “bastard child of Empire” who “*will* have [her] day” (Levy *Fruit* 327; emphasis mine). Faith’s arrival on Guy Fawkes night brings her immediate family’s history full circle as this is the night that her parents arrived in England on the Jamaica Planter’s ship almost thirty years before. Like Wade, Faith sees the “[f]ireworks in the night sky over England” and interprets them as “a welcome home” (Levy *Fruit* 339). She also allows herself, like Wade, to believe that “it may be a welcome for [her] having travelled so far and England needing” her (Levy *Fruit* 339). In the final paragraph, Faith realizes that she “knew this was England, November the fifth. There are always fireworks on November the fifth” (Levy *Fruit* 339). While Faith is not receiving a national welcome, she is bringing home the gift of her cultural identity. Faith embarked “on a geographical and emotional

journey through her ancestral heritage and then returns to London, ready to claim it” in a manner “that best fits her reborn sense of self” (McLeod 48). Faith feels more firmly that she is British, thus she is truly the “bastard child of Empire” and her cultural identity is more secured by leaving England for a time to connect to her parents’ Jamaican past. In the last sentence of the novel, Levy reminds her audience that the Jackson family, like so many other immigrants, belongs in England and that there is no shame in their history. Faith thinks, “I was coming home to tell everyone...My mum and dad came to England on a banana boat” (Levy *Fruit* 339).

With this conclusion, Levy brings the Jackson family’s story full circle, and she gives backchat to the notion that the idea of an immigrant narrative is to tell the story of nameless, footless, homeless, history-less people. Too often, host-country nationals cast immigrants into these roles, assuming all migrants fall into this neat, explainable group. Judgement of immigrants can be easy because they typically remain isolated from mainstream society, forming diasporic communities whenever and wherever possible. Socio-cultural isolation provides benefits to immigrants, such as the security of knowing one’s community; however, one of the downsides to isolation is no interaction between members of different cultural groups in social settings. Levy’s novels of identity are interesting because there is no effort by the first generation to live near other immigrants. The Charles, Jacobs, and Jackson families seem to avoid other immigrants and immigrant communities. Perhaps Levy does this to demonstrate that government-sponsored housing did not necessarily isolate immigrant groups to the extent believed; public housing was/is probably assigned by need and availability. Levy is possibly showing how easily the second generation assimilates, releasing any attachment to their parents’ historical and cultural past when there are no communities around reflecting that past. What is clear is that Levy poses many questions about second-generation identity, some of which remain unanswered.

Andrea Levy's novels of identity address the recurrent themes of race, national identity, and cultural identity. These topics are relevant to the experiences of second generation Britons of Caribbean descent, and any of the three novels discussed in this chapter could be used as examples for these topics. This flexibility of these three novels to relate to the topics is telling; this suggests that like their immigrant parents, the second generation has much in common with each other and that their Britain did not always give them a sense of 'home'. There seems to be a level of displacement among this group that bleeds onto the pages of Levy's novels of identity. While being Caribbean means belonging to many places at once, Levy demonstrates that in the decades following WWII and especially during the 1960s after decolonisation, being British evolved from a homogenous racial, national, or cultural identity to one that included people from throughout the former Empire. The concept of being British, but particularly a Briton, became an amorphous state of being in the period that Levy's novels encompass. Whether this new quality of Briton or British-ness benefits or harms the nation is yet to be determined. However, the idea of Levy challenging this idea of British-ness offers the possibility for a more inclusive national identity—one that accepts other races and cultures but is especially open to welcoming races and ethnicities altered by the intrusion of the British Empire. When Levy questions this enmeshed idea of the White, British-born Briton, she challenges the revisionist history of Enoch Powell and others like him who altered British history to the exclusion of colonisation, colonies, and the existence of British people who may also be Asian, Caribbean, and African. Levy's novels of identity fit neatly into a historical period that second generation children did not necessarily, and these novels attempt to close that historical fissure into which these children's stories have fallen. Levy and her generation of British writers who also have an immigrant past inaugurate a new period in British literary history—that of the Black British novel, which addresses issues and

people that prior British literary pieces erased or avoided. After the contributions of authors like Levy, British Literature is a more inclusive now than in the past.

**CHAPTER IV:**

**EXPOSING BABYLON:**

**DIASPORIC CHARIBBEAN POETRY AND THE POLITICS OF GIVING BACKCHAT**

## Una Marson's Immigrant Narrative: Poetry Before the *Windrush*

Little brown girl  
Why did you leave  
Your little sunlit land

from "Little Brown Girl" Una Marson

Una Marson (1905-1965) was born in Jamaica and immigrated to England, arriving on 9 July 1932. Before her arrival, Marson published two collections of poetry in Jamaica reflecting her observations on society, culture, and nature. After moving to England and gaining first-hand experience with migration and living abroad, Marson's poetry began to examine Caribbean immigrant life in England during the 1930s. Of Marson's immigrant poems, the piece that best describes these experiences in pre-WWII England is "Quashie Comes to London" (1937), narrated by Quashie, an Afro-Caribbean male immigrant living overseas. Unlike Jean Rhys' pre-WWI protagonist Anna Morgan from *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), Marson's narrator seems as settled in England as at home. Quashie's ability simply to 'fit in' challenges the belief that racial or cultural differences *should* exclude immigrants from adapting to or being accepted into a host society but instead suggests that not all immigrants were subjected to a cold reception in England, which is the impression given in the texts of many immigrant writers. Marson also challenges some gendered notions about Caribbean immigrant life in England. Many Caribbean female writers in the UK focus on the victimisation of immigrant women while Caribbean male writers turn their attentions toward the over-sexualisation of Black men in a majority White country; Marson does neither. Few Caribbean male characters are created by Caribbean female writers<sup>32</sup>, and each provides a nuanced look at the male immigrant experience. Marson, however,

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<sup>32</sup> See Beryl Gilroy's *Boy Sandwich* (1989) and *Green Grass Tango* (2001)

does not attempt to depict Caribbean male immigrant life as it happened but as she imagined it to be, which contrasts from the Caribbean female immigrant experience in the same setting.

“Quashie Comes to London” was first published in Marson’s collection *The Moth and the Star* (1937), which was one of three poetry volumes self-published in Jamaica in the 1930s (Donnell 13). While today being self-published holds a less-than-impressive connotation, being published at all was quite an accomplishment for a Caribbean woman of the 1930s. The fact that Marson’s poems survived and have been republished is a testament both to her talent and the pieces’ ability to reach audiences at home and abroad. “Quashie” is written in the form of a letter by Quashie, a newly-arrived Jamaican immigrant in Britain. In his letter, Quashie writes to his friends and girlfriend using a non-standard Jamaican English, which can be identified as a Jamaican Creole. The Jamaican Creole used in this poem, and some of Marson’s others, is a hybrid language reflecting several West African languages, most likely from Ghana, as well as two European languages, English and Spanish. There are some possible explanations for the use of Jamaican Creole in this poem, particularly when Marson uses standard, academic Jamaican English<sup>33</sup> in many others.

In an interview with Dennis Scott, late Jamaican poet and cultural icon Louise Bennett (1919-2006) questioned: “why more of our poets and writers were not taking more of an interest in the kind of language usage...instead of writing in that same old English way about Autumn” (Morris xi). Bennett implied that Jamaican poets and writers should turn their attentions to using

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<sup>33</sup> The term standard Jamaican English is used for two reasons. First, there is a standard, academic form of English in Jamaica just as there is a standard academic British or American English. To ignore this fact would be to adopt a dismissive attitude towards other forms of English. These Englishes are the languages of the academics that are often not used or understood by non-academics. For a real-world example, see any comments made about then Senator Obama’s use of academic English during his first campaign for the US presidency. Second, the use of the term ‘dialect’ referencing any language minimises that language’s cultural and historic value. Other researchers agree with the omission of the term ‘dialect’ from linguistic studies. C.L. Inness writes, “[Kamau] Brathwaite dismisses terms such as ‘dialect’ because they reiterate the hierarchy between metropolitan Standard English and suggest that the language as it is spoken by Caribbean people is marginal or inferior” (107).

a language that is more representative of Jamaican identity than British. The use of Jamaican Creole may indicate a shift in Marson's consciousness from British subject living in Jamaica to Jamaican living in England—her way of counteracting “the effects of the ‘filter of England’” (Breiner 108). Marson's earlier poetry, such as the pieces in *Tropic Reveries* (1930), utilise a standard, academic British English and a style that aligns more with modern British poetry writing than contemporary Caribbean poetry. In “Jamaica” (1930), Marson characterises the island as the “Thou Fairest Island of the Western Sea” (line 1). While this line describes a natural setting, which literary theorist Laurence A. Breiner considers one of the “principle subjects of West Indian poetry” until the 1920s, it reads as though the author is English based on the terminology and use (109). This style of poetry writing could be described as “poems that attempt to accommodate West Indian experience to highly virtuosic (and therefore prestigious) traditional forms” (Breiner 112). Breiner notes that 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century West Indian poetry “exemplifies mastery of an inherited medium”—the writers, who were British visitors and not residents, “place their work unself-consciously in the British tradition” (105). By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the goal of Caribbean poets was still “mastery of form, but this generation of regional poets, unlike previous generations, originated from the West Indian middle class (Breiner 107). Breiner believes that the imitation of British poetry by West Indian poets was initially an attempt by this group of poets to write “what others will recognize as poetry,” thus the reliance on British academic English (107).

Marson's poetic style in “Jamaica” is reminiscent of the works of 19<sup>th</sup>-century poets such as Lord Byron and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, which she would have been familiar with as a middle-class Jamaican child who received a British education. Byron's “She Walks in Beauty” (1815) contains some of his best-known lines, such as “She walks in beauty, like the night/Of

cloudless climes and starry skies” (lines 1-2). This poem describes a woman so beautiful that only the most unrealistic terms can explain her appearance, such as the idea of walking in Beauty. In Barrett Browning’s “A Vision of Poets” (1843), she constructs a relationship between the artist and suffering, describing the correlation between sleeplessness and genius. She writes, “A poet could not sleep aright,/For his soul kept up too much light/Under his eyelids for the night” (lines 1-3). An examination of the vocabulary and tone of all three poems suggests there are similarities in the styles of Marson, Byron, and Barrett Browning as writers representing the Caribbean pre-independence, Romantic, and Victorian periods, respectively, because they were the products of the British education system, which included studying pieces from the English canon and adopting British academic English as the language of their poetry.

In Marson’s “Jamaica,” there are other examples of the influence of British writing on her work beginning with her choice of vocabulary. Marson writes of Jamaica’s “woods” and “fields...covered o’er with Daisies bright” (line 11 and 15). Most Caribbeans are only familiar with the term “woods” from foreign texts. Regionally, the term for a place where there is lush foliage is ‘the bush’. The term for foliage overtaking cultivated land is ‘going to ground/bush’; rarely will a Caribbean use the term ‘woods’ or ‘forest’. Like Jamaica Kincaid would state decades after the publication of Marson’s poem, flowers like daffodils and daisies do not grow in the Caribbean and most Caribbeans are only aware of them from pictures in foreign books or poems; anthurium or hibiscus are better examples as they grow wild and are common sights throughout the region. Marson’s use of terms like “woods” and “daisies” reveals a disconnection from regional issues and an attachment to Britain that only her immigration would challenge.

Marson’s use of Jamaica Creole may have a simpler explanation. In trying to portray a sort of ‘everyman’ Jamaican, Marson may have decided to allow Quashie to use Jamaican

Creole—the every-day language of most Jamaicans—to make him more likeable and realistic while rooting him in the working class like many Caribbean immigrants migrating to Britain in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Jamaican Creole is a sign of social, national, and cultural attachment, grounding its speakers in national and cultural histories. In this case, it is spoken by a character who seems like an innocent abroad and whose use of Jamaican Creole does little to alleviate this view. Yet, one should never assume that Quashie’s use of Jamaican Creole indicates a lack of intellect although the origin and use of the name Quashie in Jamaica suggests otherwise.

The name Quashie originated among the West African Akan people from Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire. Leanna Prendergast’s research on Jamaican Maroon culture reveals that Akan culture exercised considerable influence on Maroon child naming. The West African custom is to name children based on the day they are born. ‘Quashie’ is the male Jamaican Maroon version of the Akan name Kwesi, indicating that the child was born on a Sunday. In Jamaican popular culture, the name Quashie has two meanings. Michelle Cliff’s novel *No Telephone to Heaven* (1996) equates the name Quashee with a traitor, using it to reference the story of Three Fingered Jack and Quashie (211). Research by Karyl Walker for the *Jamaica Observer* on the legend surrounding the Maroon guerrilla rebel Three Fingered Jack, or Jack Mansong, reveals that Quashie converted to Christianity, changing his name to John Reeder. With the help of a slave boy named A Good Shot, Quashie murdered Mansong, decapitated him, and cut off the hand with three fingers on 27 January 1781; both “trophy” were placed on display in Morant Bay. In exchange for his betrayal of a Maroon rebel who could be described as the Jamaican Robin Hood, Quashee collected a reward of £300<sup>34</sup>, which was a fortune then, emphasising the threat Mansong’s activities posed to the colony.

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<sup>34</sup> £49,500 (\$62,000) in 2017

The other connotation attached to the name Quashie in Jamaican slang is simple-minded or stupid. Quashie is the slave, or former slave, who continues to trust Caribbean Creoles and British colonials despite their repeated betrayals. He is gullible—a man easily misled by his Afro-Jamaican compatriots. While some readers may quickly dismiss Marson’s Quashie as the typical country bumpkin who comes to the big city, he is not. The connotation of ignorance attached to his name notwithstanding, Quashie is neither dim-witted nor treacherous but a careful observer of life. Other researchers refer to Quashie as “the Jamaican man in the street” (Henriques 170).

The use of non-standard Jamaican English serves an additional purpose. In having Quashie ‘speak’ in Jamaican Creole, Marson maintains his identity. There are other literary examples of Caribbean characters that lose or abandon their Caribbean identities and adopt Eurocentric identities using language. V. S. Naipaul’s *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) begins with a likeable, everyman character, Ganesh Ramsumair, who is a simple man with big dreams. Eventually, Ganesh becomes successful, but by the end of the novel he morphs into “G. Ramsey Muir,” complete with a contrived English accent although he has never set foot in England before (208). Quashie is Ganesh’s opposite because he does not alter any aspect of his personality. Although he is in a new setting, he remains Quashie and continues to speak in Jamaican Creole.

Scholar and poet Honor Ford-Smith describes Una Marson’s pieces that employ Jamaican Creole as “creole dialogue poems” (35). Using Jamaican Creole as the language of these poems is necessary because, according to cultural theorist J. Michael Dash citing Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Black Orpheus* (1948), “black poetry was essentially a fierce response to the inadequacy of language” (xx). This position could be expanded to state that European languages are neither

as expressive nor as emotive to Caribbean speakers as creolised languages, particularly as in this region creolisation is the norm. This “fierce response” using Jamaican Creole is also Marson challenging the position that only standard languages *should* be employed in literature. The use of a *lingua franca* such as Jamaican Creole also challenges the popular belief that poetry belongs to the elite and the well-educated. In fact, Breiner’s examination of Caribbean poetry reveals that both poetry and drama are more accessible to the regional populace because they can be “memorized and re-enacted” and are “not bound to the physical book” (19). If the term “black poetry” is altered to “the poetry of the Caribbean,” the inadequacy of any standardised form of English, French, Spanish, or Dutch to express the emotion imbedded in the work of a Caribbean poet becomes clearer.

The European languages used in the Caribbean are the remnants of colonisation, and, while they are learned and accepted throughout the region, they lack some critical element of expression that is present in Creole. European languages allow Caribbeans to communicate, but Creole articulates in a more meaningful way making it a cultural code<sup>35</sup> specific to its speakers. The use of Jamaican Creole in “Quashie” demonstrates the inadequacy of standard Jamaican English to convey Quashie’s meaning. For example, the term ‘gwine’ is more meaningful to a Caribbean than the standard ‘going’. There is something about saying to a friend, ‘Ah gwine’ that ‘I am going’ fails to express; the connotation is difficult to definitively convey to a non-Caribbean, but what can be stated is that to a Caribbean speaker, Creole is simply more evocative. Creole conveys meaning in a way that does not effectively translate into any other language; while the individual words can be translated, the more complex meaning cannot.

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<sup>35</sup> See Hyatt and Simmons p. 24

When using a non-standard language in a text, there is always the possibility that the author will not be valued as an artist as creolised languages are usually considered less artistic or acceptable than standardised languages in academic circles. In the introduction to her collection on Marson's poetry, postcolonial literary scholar Alison Donnell, citing J.E. Clare McFarlane's *Literature in the Making* (1957), notes his discussion of Marson's "dialect" poems (18). According to McFarlane, Marson's work demonstrates a "revival of interest in the thought and sentiment of the common people as expressed through the medium created by themselves," meaning the Jamaican Creole that evolved from the gathering of many language groups on the island and this is now the language of the working class (96 as quoted in Donnell 18). This statement suggests a discomfort with or detachment from Jamaican Creole as well as with the "common people" whose thoughts and circumstances the poetry is meant to express. The marginalisation of so-called dialect texts in literary criticism has long been an issue and these works have often not received the recognition that they deserve because of the language used despite their artistic merit.

Bennett stated in 1968, "I have been set apart by other creative writers a long time ago because of the language I speak and work in...From the beginning nobody recognized me as a writer" (as quoted from Brathwaite 19 cited in Ford-Smith 35). Bennett's statement provides an example of the claim that literature utilising non-standard languages are typically marginalised as art. Creolised languages are the highest form of artistic expression, representing a linguistic palimpsest—the construction of language-as-art over established languages. However, texts using creolised languages continue to be isolated, albeit not to the extent in the contemporary period that they were in earlier literary studies. Innes writes, "only the mother tongue spoken in childhood and in the home carries the emotional weight and connotations that are important to

poetry and prose” (98). To Innes’ contention, it should be noted that the mother tongue provides an emotional connection to home when spoken by the emigrant. Marson’s use of Jamaican Creole in “Quashie” provides a sense of the narrator’s connection to home, Jamaica, which can only be expressed in the language that is most familiar to him. Quashie writes home using his mother tongue because it is the language that best conveys his feelings about his observations, and it is the language that his Jamaican audience will understand, which raises the question of audience. As “Quashie” is written in Jamaican Creole, it is written for a local audience. Thus, Jamaican Creole in the poem serves the dual purpose of promoting the use of a creolised mother tongue as a form of artistic expression and acknowledging the narrator’s affiliation with Jamaica.

The Jamaican Creole terms used repeatedly throughout the poem, such as “gwine” (going), “dem” (them), “fe” (for), and “de” (they) reinforce Quashie’s connection to Jamaica and to his ancestral home Africa. Innes, citing Kamau Brathwaite, states “Caribbean English carries with it a suppressed African identity which surfaces and continues in particular works and forms” (107). Brathwaite’s assessment is confirmed by the work of linguists specializing in African Diaspora languages. Literature and language theorist Geneva Smitherman’s *Talkin and Testifyin* asserts that African American language styles are derived from patterns found in certain West African languages” (McLaren 98). Literary theorist Joseph McLaren states that according to “Smitherman’s definition, ‘Black Dialect is an Africanized form of English’” (Smitherman 2 and 5 quoted 98). Smitherman’s theory could be extended to Caribbean Englishes as she acknowledges the connection between Caribbean and West African languages (McLaren 98). However, despite its connection to West African languages, Caribbean English also carries a strong sense of Caribbean identity—not only regionally in a broader manner, but nationally, within a community, and certainly in a family. Although there are various forms of Caribbean

Creole, each Creole language contains specific identifiers. Quashie's Creole classifies him as a Jamaican, from a specific community and family, and even his self-imposed exile in England cannot alter these identifying factors.

Historian Imaobong Umoren posits that Marson's experiences and observations drove her to "search for her African identity" (64). In Marson's personal life, her quest for identity took the form of Marson wearing her hair naturally and her socio-political Pan-African activism in England. Marson's African identity is also articulated through her poetry. Quashie's use of Jamaican Creole could be Marson's way of connecting to Africa while at the same time disconnecting from Britain and Empire with all that they imply. Marson's use of Jamaican Creole in "Quashie" allows her an artistic forum to oppose her "British" identity as incidents of racism, sexism, isolation, and rejection in England "shattered her innocence about the superiority of the 'Motherland'" (Umoren 64-65). Marson is using Jamaican Creole as an identifier, and the way that Quashie 'speaks' enables her audience to identify him within a larger group of speakers of Caribbean English in Britain. The specificity of Quashie's English not only pinpoints his nationality but prevents him from creating a new metropolitan identity "formed out of the realization of how [he was] perceived in the 'motherland'" (Umoren 63). Thus, the language of the poem explores national identity while providing a description of the immigrant experience.

The poem describes Caribbean immigrant life in Britain beginning in the first stanza. Quashie states, "I qwine tell you 'bout de English/And I aint gwine tell no lie,/'Cause I come quite here to Englan'/Fe see wid me own eye" (Marson lines 1-4). In these lines, Quashie clearly states his intentions: to give a truthful account of the English. He also states that he will describe the English based on what he has seen of them in England—their environment. At first glance, it would be easy to assume that Quashie will complain about England or the English. However,

this could not be further from the truth. Quashie makes the following statement about the English, emphasising his feelings toward them: “I tink I love dem bes’ of all” (Marson line 17). Quashie seems comfortable around the English although his contact with them is relegated to the police he observes on the street “who are as nice as nice can be” or the waitresses he encounters in restaurants who he claims, “speak to me wid charm” (Marson lines 10 and 140). At no point in the poem does Quashie write about anyone making him feel like an ‘alien’; he seems at home in England. In addition, Quashie’s England is only the portion of London that he inhabits; there is no mention of English people in a close or personal way; he does not mention having much contact with them. Therefore, his perceptions are based on those limited interactions, which seem entirely positive.

In discussing the police, Quashie states “An’ talking ‘bout de Bobbie dem,/Dem is nice as nice can be” (Marson lines 9-10). This is an odd observation given claims of racial profiling and police brutality in England during in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the poem, Quashie does not give the impression that he is afraid of the police or that they make him feel uncomfortable as a Black man in England in the decades before WWII. In fact, his statements indicate the opposite. Quashie is not harassed by the police like other immigrants are, such as Selina from Rhys’ short story “Let Them Call It Jazz” (1927). He states, “dem nebber fas’ wid you me frien” (Marson line 13). Quashie describes the English police as “nice” and that they can be helpful “If you get lass as you often will” (Marson line 7). By the 1970s, texts such as Maureen Cain’s *Society and the Policeman’s Role* (1973) and the Institute of Race Relations’ *Police against Black People* (1979) documented the many incidents of racism and abuse exerted on Black people in England in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The reference to these “nice” police could demonstrate Marson’s attempt at satire or sarcasm—her way of addressing a painful reality with

humour. Referring to the police as “nice” could also point to Marson’s perceptions of the Caribbean male immigrant experience. She may view immigrants as having fewer issues with acceptance than female immigrants.

Race is a persistent element in Marson’s work that does not seem to present as much of an issue for Quashie as it does for female immigrant characters. In the poem, Quashie describes his interactions with English women. He states, “I know you wan’ fe hear jus’ now/What I tink of dese white girls,/Well I tell you straight, dem smile ‘pon me,/But I prefer black pearls!” (Marson lines 21-24). In this stanza, Quashie informs his friends back home that while White women might “smile ‘pon” him, his preference is for Black women. Quashie’s statement also implies that there is no prejudice towards him as a Black man. Perhaps the smiles that Quashie receives from White women suggest that they may be willing to offer him more, such as a sexual relationship. Trinidadian Sam Selvon, in his novel *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), constantly references sexual liaisons between Afro-Caribbean men and White English women, confirming these men’s willingness to have affairs with lovers outside of their race. In the novel, Selvon describes a character called Galahad who has his first date and sexual encounter with a White woman, stating “This was something he uses [sic] to dream about in Trinidad” (79). Andrea Levy gives a similar description of the sexual attraction Black men have for White women, albeit briefly, in her ground-breaking novel, *Small Island* (2004). In the novel, Queenie, a White Briton, has an affair with Michael, an Afro-Jamaican, and the brief sexual encounter seems to be a romantic relationship until Queenie comes to the realisation that Michael was just using her to fulfil a sexual fantasy and for a place to stay until his ship sails. George Lamming also addresses this fascination with the Black male form in *The Emigrants* (1954) when Dickson thinks that he will have a sexual encounter with his White British landlady only to discover that she and her

sister “only wanted to see what he *looked* like” (266). The discovery that he is a mere curiosity sends Dickson running into the streets, “[h]is shirt flying outside the pants, and the wind lashed his face” (Lamming 266). These writers seem to propose that there is no racial fidelity to Black women once Afro-Caribbean men arrive in England. In Selvon’s stream-of-consciousness section of *The Lonely Londoners*, the narrator states “as far as spades hitting spades it ain’t have nothing like that for a spade wouldn’t hit a spade when it have [sic] so much other talent on parade,” meaning that there is little benefit in Black men and women engaging in a sexual relationship in England when there are men and women of other races to “hit” (99). Caribbean female writers have also described situations in which Afro-Caribbean men openly reject Black women in favour of White women; Eintou Pearl Springer’s poem “London Blues” (2005) provides such an example and will be discussed in detail later.

Quashie does not seem to struggle with social alienation, and there are some explanations for his inclusion or perhaps a lack of exclusion. The possibility exists that Quashie is simply not alienated; he may not be made to feel unwelcomed in England. When he describes his positive interactions with the police officer at the beginning of the poem and with the waitress at the end of the poem, these dealings with White Britons suggest that he is not being actively alienated (Marson lines 7-8). The Britons that he encounters do not seem to discriminate against him based on his descriptions, which is completely different from claims by other Black immigrants in Marson’s poems. In Marson’s “Nigger” (1933), published in the League of Coloured Peoples’ journal *The Keys*, there is a very different description of the Black Caribbean experience in the pre-WWII years than provided in “Quashie.” The poem, in which the narrator describes going home to a room to “sob my heart away,” seems to be written from the immigrant male perspective as the narrator references “Coloured men” and “he” throughout (Marson lines 13 and

20). The narrator questions, “What makes the dark West Indian/Fight at being called a Nigger?” (Marson lines 16-17). This question is raised in response to being called “Nigger” by “little white urchins.../As s[he] passed along the street” (Marson lines 1, 2, and 4). At no point in “Nigger” is Quashie’s “nice” police officer present to drive away these children who are hurling racial slurs at an adult. Instead, the narrator, hurt and uncomfortable in this unwelcoming public space, retreats to a lonely room to cry. Marson proposes two responses for the unnamed narrator in “Nigger.” First, the narrator retreats to his room to cry. This display of vulnerability is an atypical response for a Caribbean male based on fictional representations of this group by male writers. Novelists like Selvon and Naipaul in the *Windrush* era imbued their Caribbean male characters with misogynistic tendencies, making them appear completely without emotions at times. Second, the narrator in “Nigger” wonders what makes the “dark West Indian” want to “Fight at being called a Nigger.” The idea of fighting for equality and justice seems more aligned with the idea of being West Indian if Black resistance to slavery and colonial government are considered. These contrary emotional responses suggest that Marson may have been unsure of how a Caribbean male would respond to being called “Nigger,” so she writes a combination of her response, which is to cry, and her interpretation of the male response, which is to fight. In contrast to the narrator of “Nigger,” Quashie delights in the sights and sounds of London, taking in the “shows” where people can “hear some fun an’ see some sights” (Marson lines 33 and 49). He even goes to the parks where “In spring you feel you [sic] heart astir/When you hear de birdies sing” (Marson lines 97-98). One can hardly imagine the narrator of “Nigger” delighting in any element of immigrant life in England.

Another possibility for Quashie’s descriptions of positive interactions with Britons and experiences in London could be that he is writing what he wants his friends to read. Quashie

could be altering information to make his daily struggles easier to endure or to make his life in England appear more liveable than it is to his friends. Caribbean migration scholar Elizabeth Thomas-Hope posits that only a partial reality of the migration experience is described to friends and family in the Caribbean by the migrant abroad (166). Unpleasant experiences are typically viewed by migrants as expected events that will ultimately be outweighed by attaining their goals (Thomas-Hope 166). Thomas-Hope concludes that “hardship in migration gives rise to a sense of heroism” both in the perception of the migrants and those at home, and this heroism cannot be diminished with complaints (166). However, this second possibility contradicts Quashie’s statement from the first stanza, which is that he “aint gwine tell no lie” (Marson line 2). It is also possible that Quashie, if he is true to the second meaning of his name, is simply ignorant of overt or covert demonstrations of alienation in social situations. While some people are oblivious to stares or harsh words, it would be difficult to do so indefinitely. Rather, Quashie seems to legitimately feel at ease in England. Although Quashie is not completely incorporated into English society, he is also not excluded.

In the fifth stanza, Quashie expresses his feelings about English people, specifically those in London. He states, “I tink I love dem bes’ of all/De people in dis town,/For dem seem to hab some life in dem/An’ you nebber see dem frown” (Marson lines 17-20). Quashie describes Londoners as full of life and cheerful, which differs from other literary descriptions of Londoners or Britons, such as “Nigger” (1933) and Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners*. In “Nigger,” a narrator describes being given this sobriquet by “little white urchins,” which depicts even the smallest Britons as racists and casts some doubt on Quashie’s contentions about the English (Marson line 2). Selvon’s character Galahad receives the cold shoulder from a mother on the street, prompting him to wonder “Lord, what it is we people do in this world that we have to

suffer so? What it is we want that the white people and them [sic] find it so hard to give?" (76). Quashie fails to acknowledge that the English are not always welcoming to foreigners, especially Black foreigners. As cultural and historical geographer Caroline Bressey notes, "London, Liverpool and Cardiff were often cited by members of the League [of Coloured Peoples] as places where black people faced...*regular* discrimination (emphasis mine; 32). Given this information, Quashie's claims of cheerful Londoners seem unbelievable or at least questionable.

Marson was not exempt from discrimination in London. Marson biographer Delia Jarrett-Macauley's research on Marson's early years in England depict Marson's London as a terrifying place that was better avoided. Jarrett-Macauley found that "Una dreaded going out because people stared at her" (49). Marson, like the narrator in "Nigger," was called "Nigger" by "small children with short dimpled legs" who added insult to injury by putting "out their tongues at her" (Jarrett-Macauley 49). Marson's treatment in this White-dominated public space drove her inside to her room in the Moody<sup>36</sup> home in fear and out of self-preservation (Jarrett-Macauley (47). Much like the narrator of "Nigger," Marson hid in her room at 164 Queen's Road because the outside world offered her, as a Black female immigrant, "No safety" (Jarrett-Macauley 50).

Quashie, on the other hand, is full of affection for the English, first and foremost because he does not experience incidents of discrimination in the way that female characters such as Jean Rhys' Anna Morgan or Selina Davis do. Anna and Selina are mistaken for prostitutes—Anna because she is walking down the street at night and Selina because she is a Black woman living in the home of a man that the neighbours assume is a pimp. Even Marson noticed that "men were curious" about her and she was offended by their gazes (Jarrett-Macauley 49). In each situation, the person receiving the male gaze—the object—is a Caribbean female immigrant, emphasising

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<sup>36</sup> Harold Arundel Moody (1882-1947) was a Jamaican physician and founder of the League of Coloured Peoples. Marson lived with his family when she first arrived in England.

the negative connotation attached to a woman migrating alone. In fictional accounts, Caribbean male immigrants encounter fewer incidents of discrimination during the pre-WWII period than females. Quashie is in a completely different position as a Black man; perhaps he is accepted as worker or as a possible sexual object, but he is not alienated. Because Quashie does not experience alienation in England, he enjoys his time there like other male immigrant characters.

Quashie's pleasant experience in England is like the older male speaker in Marson's poem "Foreign" (1937), who laments "Here pretty fe true.../But tings is bad, foreign better" (Marson lines 50-51). In "Foreign," the unnamed narrator is an old man who was overseas during WWI. Marson's unnamed narrator discusses the Caribbean immigrant experience in England from the perspective of a Caribbean male migrant who claims to prefer 'away' to 'home', taking the position that the opportunities offered to immigrants in England far outweigh any benefits of remaining at home. The premise of "Foreign" is self-reflection; specifically, Marson focuses on the lack of economic opportunities at home—the push factors promoting immigration. Within the poem's theme of self-examination is the idea that going overseas is the preference to staying at home because there are more opportunities available for people who are willing to work hard, which is not always the case at home. Despite the significance of this topic, Quashie is silent about employment; he never discusses work so there is no way to determine exactly how he copes with this aspect of his life. Regardless, what is clear is that Quashie likes the "happy" English and he seems content with life in London. In "Foreign," Marson provides another example of the relevance of gender to the immigrant experience. In these texts, gender is directly related to social acceptance and the possibility of assimilating into British society.

Quashie and the unnamed speaker in "Foreign" feel comfortable in England. Quashie seems to enjoy his time abroad, going to shows and seeing the sights whereas the unnamed

speaker in “Foreign” is more focused on the opportunities for sustainability that being “away” offer him. Based on the narrator’s descriptions, gender seems to be a relevant factor in discussions of immigration and the incorporation of immigrants into a host society. Male immigrants seem to be more welcomed in England, partly because they are not seen in a negatively-sexual way or perhaps because societies tend to see men as contributing to the workforce. Female immigrants may be viewed as taking advantage of social services benefits. Women can bear children, which, if they are not gainfully and sustainably employed, places a strain on the social welfare system. The assumption attached to women traveling abroad alone prior to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was that they were likely prostitutes or at least promiscuous. In contrast, the sexual behaviours of male immigrants are neither analysed nor criticised regardless of their behaviour.

Although Quashie describes having very positive experiences in England throughout this poem, at the end he is wistful. Quashie admits that regardless of how much fun he has or how pleasant England is, he longs for home. Quashie describes going to a restaurant called Lyons on the Strand and ordering “Some ripe breadfruit,/Some fresh ackee and saltfish too/An’ dumplings” (Marson lines 142-144). When Quashie receives a plate of what he describes as “pigeon feed,” his disappointment is almost tangible (Marson line 156). He states, “It’s den I miss me home sweet home/Me good ole rice an’ peas/An’ I say I is a fool fe come/To dis lan’ of starve an’ sneeze” (Marson lines 157-160). This stanza not only describes Quashie’s longing for home but his regret at leaving. This England is now the “lan’ of starve an’ sneeze”—the place where all is not bountiful and the cold can be unbearable. In this line, Quashie tarnishes the image of Mother England as the land of opportunity.

The reference to England as a place where people “starve” is also relevant because while immigration is often regarded as the solution to economic distress, the reality is that many immigrants fail to achieve marginal success. For example, Jean Rhys’ immigrant experience was plagued by financial instability that left her nearly destitute and a barely functional alcoholic in the decades between WWII and the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966. Novels such as Joan Riley’s *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987) and Buchi Emecheta’s *In the Ditch* (1972) depict immigrant life in England as containing more “starve an’ sneeze” than success. These examples cast doubt on Quashie’s original claims, making his statements about life in England being completely pleasant seem like exaggerations. Quashie’s England is, by the end of the poem, his fictitious creation.

In the last stanza, Quashie states, “it not gwine be anoder year/Before you see me face” (Marson lines 165-166). Here, Quashie braces the readers of his letter for the bombshell of the final line. He admits in line 165 that he will be home soon; too much time has been spent away. What Quashie expresses as the need for friends and family to see his face is his desire to see their faces; he is homesick. Quashie admits that “Dere’s plenty dat is really nice,” reaffirming that some of the positive stories Caribbeans heard about England are true (Marson line 167). However, in line 168, the final line of the poem, Quashie admits that something has been troubling him all along—that he has, in fact, felt the isolation of being a Black man in a majority White-populated country. In the last line of Quashie’s letter, he writes, “I sick fe see white face” (Marson line 168). This line is the culmination of the social issues that Quashie has avoided discussing until this point and in it Marson is giving backchat. At no time in the poem does Quashie discuss English friends or even acquaintances; he describes going to shows but always alone. Marson uses Quashie’s social isolation to disrupt the view of England as British subjects’

Mother Country and Promised Land. She challenges her audience to look closely at that six-word statement, examining how Quashie, and other non-White immigrants, must have felt in countries in which they were a population minority often segregated from the mainstream. Marson asks her audience to consider how Quashie must have felt only seeing White faces and being the only Black face in the crowd.

England in the decades before WWII was not as hostile an environment as it would become later, but it was not a place where immigrants were made to feel welcomed. Quashie is the marginalised British subject who comes to England, the Mother Country, to work and become an active member of society, if only for a time, but is pushed to the margins of that society at every turn although less so than the narrator of “Nigger.” This poem, which leaves so much unsaid, is Marson’s critique of the idea of an English Mother Country to the Caribbean immigrant. In “Quashie” Marson challenges the notion of a Caribbean home that is away and to the concept of Caribbeans looking to England as Mother Country when, if they are in the Caribbean, they are already there. The countries in which they reside are their Mother Countries; therefore, there is no need to look ‘away’ to find ‘home’. Marson also gives backchat to the homogenous, unpleasant immigrant experience in “Quashie.” Too often, immigrant narratives are plagued with stories of misery abroad. While these narratives are factual, Marson disrupts the typical immigrant narrative with Quashie’s love of all things English. The last line of the poem is the only one that takes on the tone of the typical immigrant narrative; the rest presents a positive image of life abroad.

Marson can be credited with launching the era of Caribbean immigrant poetry, and, like other female writers who were before their time, her poetry was essentially lost to literary history for over fifty years. Yet, Marson’s ability to provide a description of Caribbean immigrant life

using Jamaican Creole cannot be ignored, and her pieces retain their relevance today as, yet again, immigration from the developing world to the developed world continues but in numbers far greater than in previous decades. Marson's immigrant narrative poetry, which describes the racism and xenophobia of the pre-WWII years, has become more relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century because these social ills are still present. The influx of immigrants into host countries is causing a backlash of racism and xenophobia that are still disturbing. In addition to remaining relevant, Marson's immigrant narrative poems provide some historical background on Caribbean immigration to the UK prior to WWII, which, except for information provided by Peter Fryer in *Staying Power* (1984), was not well-documented. Marson's use of male narrators does little to contribute to piecing together the experiences of Caribbean female immigrant in the UK prior to the arrival of the *Windrush*, thus creating another historical fissure into which women are allowed to sink. Despite this shortcoming in her work, Marson's poetry can be credited with interrogating the limited historical accounts of pre-WWII Caribbean immigration to Britain by firmly placing Caribbean immigrants at the centre of her poetry.

## Calypso, Reggae, and Giving Backchat:

### Eintou Pearl Springer's and Jean Binta Breeze's Rebel Poetry

Now we woman  
have change we course  
We talk remorse  
Woman is boss  
When it comes to caring,  
sharing and achieving  
Woman is boss!

from "Woman Is Boss" by Denyse Plummer

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, two distinctly Caribbean musical styles gained international recognition: calypso from Trinidad and Tobago and reggae from Jamaica. While reggae is a relatively new musical genre, calypso has a centuries-long history rooted in Trinidad chattel slavery and emancipation. Caribbean spoken-word poetry of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reflects the influences of calypso and reggae and their national cultures. Addressing a variety of global themes, Caribbean spoken-word poetry focuses on regional society and culture. To emphasise the genre's dedication to local issues, it is composed using two distinctly Caribbean Englishes, specifically Trinidadian or Jamaican colloquial English/Creole. Una Marson and Louise Bennett's poetry were previously identified as ground breaking because both poets utilised a non-standard Jamaican English. Bennett described being criticised for using Jamaican Creole instead of standard British or Jamaican academic English in several interviews. The criticism she received as a female writer and the acceptance of male writers' use of the same non-standard English exposes a "gendered use of Creole" (deCaires Narain 70). Literary theorist Denise deCaires Narain observes,

black *male* West Indian's hyperbolic use of language is often performed as a public display to counteract, or compensate for, his relative lack of power in socioeconomic terms—verbal style, here, masking marginal status (73).

Caribbean women are not typically given opportunities to publicly express themselves in a similar manner in public although their status is typically more marginal than males in any given society. Instead, they are held to higher standards of socially-acceptable behaviour while adhering to certain gender-prescribed roles. deCaires Narain notes that men are given more freedom to navigate Caribbean public life by regional socio-cultural norms (75). In poetry, this liberty could mean using a non-standard, or creolised, English. The use of non-academic English, either from Jamaica or Trinidad, is associated with contemporary Caribbean spoken-word poetry and contemporary calypso and reggae music, which are historically seen as the dominion of working-class Caribbean males.

Sociologist Ian Boxill notes that “[a]part from the game of cricket, reggae and calypso...are perhaps the most popular forms of cultural expression in the daily lives of the ordinary masses of people” in the Caribbean (33). Connecting reggae and calypso to the “ordinary masses” implies that these musical genres are accessible because they are communicated in the language of working-class Caribbeans instead of in the highly-academic tone of regional poets such as late Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott (1930-2017) of St. Lucia or the late founder of Negritude, Aimé Césaire (1913-2008) of Martinique. Reggae and calypso lyrics pinpoint social, political, and economic issues, while challenging the seepage of foreign cultural influence into the region (Boxill 44). The emphasis on regional issues places the roots of both musical styles in 18<sup>th</sup> century chattel slavery; 19<sup>th</sup> century post-emancipation period; and the 20<sup>th</sup> century Caribbean working class.

Reggae is the product of the Rastafarian movement, gaining popularity in the early 1960s (Boxill 41). Cultural critics Kevin O’Brien Chang and Wayne Chen “view reggae as music created by Jamaicans to satisfy their spiritual and emotional needs” (2). Boxill defines reggae as

“music fit for a king”; it is a combination of ska, rock-steady and mento, which are three musical forms developed in Jamaica (42). Reggae artist Lloyd Lovinder believes that reggae was not initially message-driven but a beat; the social commentary was added to the beat later (Chang and Chen 6). Boxill and historian Jeffrey O. Ogbar suggest that social and economic factors played significant roles in the production of a type of music that provides disadvantaged youth with a voice. The product of the so-called “rude boys” of Jamaica’s urban areas, reggae gave adolescent males an opportunity to express “their socio-economic problems through singing and chanting with the help of stereos” (Boxill 42). Ogbar concurs regarding adolescent males in the US, noting that in formerly-industrialised areas in cities such as the Bronx, deindustrialisation “eviscerated the economic base for employment,” leading to increased numbers of gangs (4). Hip-hop, the American musical genre of disenfranchised youth of the 1970s and 1980s, evolved from these socio-economic issues and the environments that nursed them. In a strange turn around, godfather of ska Laurel Aitken’s music “was unexpectedly adopted by the mods and later the skinheads, who became a devoted audience” (Alleyne 5). The acceptance of Aitken’s music by racist, working-class British youth attests to the power of music like reggae and ska to reach young people living on economic and class margins of any given society. In addition, there is a connection between reggae and revolution. In the 1970s, reggae had a politically-consciousness image—particularly the songs of Jamaican superstar, Bob Marley (1945-1981), which promoted revolution, self-empowerment, and Black consciousness. In “Redemption Song” (1984), Marley sings,

Emancipate yourself from mental slavery,

None but ourselves can free our minds.

Have no fear for atomic energy,  
'Cause none of them can stop the time.

These lyrics point to social issues such as the valorisation of White cultures from both the US and the UK, which is referred to in the line about “mental slavery” as well as the proliferation of nuclear weapons in “Have no fear for atomic energy.” While these issues may seem meaningless to others, they are particularly relevant to countries like Jamaica in which White, middle-class culture from the US and Europe is peddled to hundreds of thousands of people daily through the foreign media, resulting in reliance on imported goods that many locals cannot afford. This cultural neo-colonisation is slowly eradicating regional culture and creating an economic vacuum as local products lose popularity. In addition, regardless of the presence of national military forces in every independent Caribbean nation, the fact remains that these countries are still physically small and at the mercy of much larger nations with more imposing military forces. Therefore, Marley’s reference to “atomic energy” is very relevant to a Caribbean audience, exposing regional insecurities. Marley’s song establishes a relationship between reggae, protest, and revolution, or, at the very least, the song provides examples of reggae’s ability to offer relevant social commentary. Jamaican reggae was influential in the work of spoken-word poet Jean Binta Breeze whose poetry reflects the impact of protest and revolution. Her work relies heavily on this tradition and challenges the often-masculinist nature of dub and the marginalisation or avoidance of the child immigrants who arrived in the UK after the *Windrush* years.

Calypso, the product of Trinidad and Tobago, is rooted in the chattel slavery system of the islands; the genre spread throughout the region sometime before emancipation. Boxill believes that “[m]odern-day calypso is a musical art form...derived from a reservoir of African

music brought to the Caribbean during the era of slavery” (38). Although Boxill pinpoints the origin of calypso as African music, he fails to acknowledge that in Trinidad there were several other cultural groups augmenting this musical genre, which other researchers acknowledge. Cultural researcher Peter Mason posits that Carnival, the event that showcases all calypso music, became culturally important in Trinidad in 1783 with the arrival of French Catholic planters, connecting calypso and Carnival in Trinidad’s cultural history (13). Scholar Keith Q. Warner refers to Carnival and calypso as “closely-knit twins” (11). While calypso has a Trinidadian and Tobagonian history, its origins remain ambiguous. The Amerindians who first inhabited Trinidad contributed their music, which, when combined<sup>37</sup> with Spanish music, is called *parang*. The French settlers, who inhabited the island under the Spanish, also influenced local music. Keith Q. Warner suggests five possible origins of calypso:

1. “*carieto*”: a Carib word meaning “joyous song”
2. “*carrousseaux*”: a French patois term from “archaic” French meaning “Drinking party or festivity”
3. “*caliso*”: Spanish for a topical song originating in St. Lucia
4. “*cariso*”: a Virgin Islands topical song
5. “*kaito*”: a West African (Hausa) term roughly meaning “bravo” that evolved into “*kaiso*” (8).

Warner notes that “what eventually evolved into the contemporary calypso started at the time of French settlement in Trinidad” in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (9). The merging of Amerindian, Spanish, French, and eventually English music may have created calypso.

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<sup>37</sup> *Parang* is the music of Christmastime in Trinidad and Tobago originating with the Spanish and the Amerindians and called *parranda* (party). In Trinidad and Tobago, a *parang* meant at least four men gathering to sing in celebration. While the specific origins of *parang* are not clear, what is known is that it evolved into a Christmas tradition. For more information, see the Trinidad and Tobago National Library page on *parang* or the National *Parang* Association of Trinidad and Tobago website.

While the exact origins of calypso are ambiguous, what is clear is that Europeans observed the music during slave rebellions in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. There is a theory that early slave calypsonians traded insults with each other through the lyrics (Warner 9). Some sources claim that during the slave uprisings in the Anglophone Caribbean, music acted “as a catalyst for revolutionary activity,” rousing both African slaves and European indentured servants alike to revolt against the plantocracy (Boxill 39). Ethnic music scholar John Cowley posits that in the Caribbean, “black slaves were quick to exploit any weakness in the social order,” which could easily lead to a rebellion (12). Cowley’s theory does not point to a connection between music and slave rebellion but to the region’s isolation from large, European military forces and institution of slavery, which encouraged the daily abuses of Africans, as catalysts for revolt. Still, “Europeans in the Caribbean feared the drum” because it could be a signal to revolt, which posed a threat to the delicate balance of plantation society, and because it represented “uncivilised Africa...violent disorder and the work of the devil” (Cowley 6).

Resulting from the connection between rebellion and what European planters assumed was African music solely because of the use of drums, by the late 17<sup>th</sup> century two Slave Codes were passed in Barbados alone first banning “the playing of African music and in particular the beating of drums” and later another outlawing “aspects of Afro-Barbadian music, in particular drumming and some songs of derision” (Boxill 40). After the British captured Trinidad in 1797, Police Regulations strictly “controlling dancing in the free coloured and slave communities” were implemented further emphasising White insecurities about Blacks gathering to play their music and dance (Cowley 15). Despite the passing of these regulations, African slaves could entertain the plantocracy with music or play their music during special occasions (Boxill 40). In Trinidad and Tobago, the plantocracy, while able to subvert African-influenced music, was not

able to eradicate it altogether and by 1900 calypso became a significant element of Trinidadian culture whereas it remained marginalised in Barbados until the 1940s (Boxill 40). Boxill describes Trinidad and Tobago as “the calypso mecca of the Caribbean” evidenced by the global popularity of the country’s annual Carnival; the tents<sup>38</sup> in which calypso music is first showcased by the bands; and the influence of calypso on other aspects of culture and artistic expression in the Caribbean and specifically in Trinidad and Tobago (40). It is usually in the calypso tents that politicians learn whether they are meeting the expectations of their constituents and how they are likely to fare in the coming elections.

Historically, calypso has been the voice of the masses, but it also provides political and social commentary. Mason observes that in the tents, calypsonians address “themes of national unity, of the country going to the dogs, of rising crime, poor social services, vagrants on the streets, bankrupt hospitals and political corruption” (19). Trinidadian calypsonian Slinger Francisco, who is best known by his kaiso name The Mighty Sparrow, consistently offers social and political commentary in his music. Perhaps the song best combining the two concerns is “We Like It So” (1981) in which Sparrow discusses the social issues affecting the nation under the leadership of PM Dr. Eric Williams and his People’s National Movement (PNM). In the second verse, Sparrow sings “yuh pipe ent have no water (Your pipe doesn’t have water), you pay too much for butter” then “The terrible school system is such a bloody problem.” These lyrics illustrate some of the socio-economic issues that Trinidad and Tobago faced twenty years after independence, which Williams and the PNM promised to resolve. Sparrow makes a bold statement in the middle of the song: “Birdie you may be shock when ah tell you this/Hudson-

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<sup>38</sup> Calypso tents are not tents but stadiums or halls in which calypso bands practice and prepare for Carnival. These venues are called ‘tents’ because initially the stages on which the calypsonians practiced were covered by tents. For additional information on Trinidad and Tobago’s Carnival and the tents, see Mason’s *Bacchanal* (1999).

Phillips<sup>39</sup> is a Yankee C.I.A.” These lyrics are particularly critical; Sparrow elucidates one of the major concerns of many Caribbeans—that of covert foreign infiltration and influence into regional political and economic issues with the collusion of local politicians. With the US’s history of meddling in Caribbean affairs since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this was a valid concern<sup>40</sup>. In the last verse of the song, Sparrow sings, “Bribery and corruption control every decision,” pointing to the newly-minted national issues of bribery and political corruption originating from the sources outside of the region, which became more problematic in the post-independence period. While Sparrow raises serious issues, like other calypsonians he “criticises those who need to be criticised but always with a tinge of wit and humour” and always ending “on a positive note” (Warner 19). Sparrow’s music clearly demonstrates the power of calypso to provide an astute commentary on a variety of socio-political topics. In addition, Sparrow’s lyrics illustrate how calypso can speak both to and for the people—particularly those who do not understand or who feel marginalised by a political system meant to support them but often seems to work against them.

One of the issues with calypso is that while it has been helpful in voicing what the populace cannot, it is also a rather male-dominated endeavour. Mason observes that most calypsonians are male (133). Literary scholar Louis Regis refers to calypsonians as “he” throughout *The Political Calypso* (1999). Warner states that calypsonians “are mainly men of African descent” because “slavery left its mark on the male psyche, suggesting that Caribbean men utilise this medium to rebuild a male ego suffering from a historical, centuries-long

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<sup>39</sup> Karl Hudson-Phillips was the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago between 1969 and 1970. He is known for enforcing the *Public Order Act* in response to the Black Power Riots of 1970. He also served as lead counsel on the PM Maurice Bishop murder trial. Sparrow is referring to the possibility that Hudson-Phillips was influenced by the C.I.A. in many decisions. With the complicated roles of politicians worldwide and Hudson-Phillips’ wide range of influence, the exact incident referenced in this line is difficult to pinpoint.

<sup>40</sup> US invasion of Haiti (1915-34); Grenada (1983); Panama (1989-90)

emasculatation while the Caribbean female, who also endured chattel slavery, “emerged less scathed” (95). Observations such as these by male scholars reinforce the masculinist nature of calypso music while marginalising female calypsonians. This raises the question of where women fit into calypso culture and music. One of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s notable female calypsonians is Trinibagonian Denyse Plummer, whose kaiso “Woman Is Boss” (1988) has become the mantra for women throughout the region. With this song, Plummer established herself as the *grande dame* of calypso road marches, and the presence of a woman as the top calypsonian created more opportunities for other female artists than was available to them in the previous forty years. Yet, even Plummer must pay homage to Calypso Rose (Linda McArtha Monica Sandy-Lewis), who performed for decades with little recognition until finally beating her male colleagues and winning “both Calypso Monarch and Road March Queen” (Warner 17). Despite these gains, male calypsonians continue to outnumber females. Even with masculinist overtones, calypso still manages to function on a socio-political level, providing critiques beneficial to economically and socially marginalised groups existing on the fringes of the Caribbean’s middle-class societies and articulating “deep-seated aspirations for the nation” (Regis xi). In this way, calypso has much in common with reggae. Calypso heavily impacted the work of Trinibagonian poet Eintou Pearl Springer. Her poetry, which is socio-politically relevant and highly critical, questions the sometimes-patriarchal attitudes of Black Caribbean males and their occasionally-distant attitudes towards Black woman.

Springer and Breeze represent another wave of Caribbean female writers in Britain. They are a part of the first group of writers who viewed themselves as completely Caribbean rather than Britons from the Caribbean. Unlike the majority of Caribbean emigrant writers in the UK mentioned prior, Springer and Breeze are true migrants; their migrations to Britain were

motivated by educational and financial concerns not by resettlement. Neither writer wanted to remain overseas long term because they neither had an attachment to Britain nor did they view England as their Mother Country. Breeze lives in England part-time, returning home to Jamaica frequently, limiting her time away from home, and maintaining physical and emotional connections. Springer lived in England for a year as a graduate student, taking her three daughters and immediately returning home to Trinidad after earning her master's degree. Springer and Breeze's continued physical and geographical connection to the Caribbean and their roles as migrant, working mothers, places the overall concern of their poetry set in Britain on the plight of the Caribbean female migrants living and working abroad, migrant mothering, and child immigrants. Much like the work of other Black female writers, the poetry of Springer and Breeze is multi-focal, addressing several concerns at once. This multi-directional approach provides a more accurate portrayal of the life of the female migrant who occupies in two locations at once because even when she is not physically at home, the responsibilities of home are ever present.

Springer's and Breeze's poetry also relies on the vocal because both writers are traditionally spoken-word artists. Breeze is usually classified as a dub poet, although in an interview with poetry scholar Christian Habekost she stated, "I'd rather say I am a poet and write some dub poems than say I am a dub poet" (47). Despite her connection to dub, too much attention has been paid to Breeze as a voice of dub and too little to her role as a Caribbean female poet who voices what others are unwilling or unable to say. According to poet and scholar Mervyn Morris, dub poetry combines a reggae beat with poetry that is "written to be performed" and "[d]ub poetry is usually, but not always, written...in Jamaican creole/dialect/vernacular/nation language" but can be written in any vernacular (1). Dub poetry is

linked to reggae, the musical genre originating in Rastafarian culture. As Rastafarian culture is well-known for its nature of protesting injustice, it is of no surprise that dub poetry is “politically focused, attacking oppression and injustice” (Morris 1). This focus of Rastafari on the underclass goes back to its roots when founder Leonard Howell, like Marcus Garvey before him, established a community where Jamaican Rastafarians could live and work independently of British government and Church controls (Foehr 25). The connection between Rastafarian culture and the working class, or the working poor comprised of both agricultural and industrial workers, offers some explanation for the revolutionary nature of reggae and of its offspring dub. However, like most literary forms, dub was originally dominated by male performers, including Linton Kwesi Johnson and the late Mikey Smith (1954-1983), both of Jamaica. Therefore, Breeze’s inclusion in this group not only bodes well for dub’s evolution into the voice of all instead of the voice of only males, but her inclusion and popularity suggest that Breeze’s messages are relevant to her audiences.

Breeze’s poetic style was most-likely influenced by the time she spent living “for a few years in the hills as a Rastafarian woman” (Breeze and Sharpe 608). In an interview with Jenny Sharpe, Breeze described being discovered by a Rastafarian man while sitting on the dock of Montego Bay writing (Breeze and Sharpe 608). Breeze, who was having a psychotic break, was “reacting to everything that was said on the radio” and had been previously listening to Otis Redding’s “Sitting on the Dock of the Bay” (1968) (Breeze and Sharpe 608). The Rastafarian man invited her to perform at a concert celebrating Haile Selassie’s ninetieth birthday where dub poet Mutabaruka heard her poetry recitation. That random meeting between Breeze and the Rastafarian man at Montego Bay led to Breeze becoming “the first female dub poet” (Breeze and Sharpe 608). In recent years, this classification is one that no longer fits the tone of the spoken

word poetry that Breeze performs. Breeze's contributions to dub poetry are relevant, but the focus here is the influence of reggae on Breeze's poetry and how Breeze's poetry reflects the experiences of the female child immigrant.

Like Rastafarian culture and reggae, Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival and calypso music have historically been viewed as the purview first of the emancipated slaves in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and later of the Black working class. Initially, Carnival was celebrated by French settlers in Trinidad (Mason 13). Pre-emancipation Carnival included "masked balls, house to house visiting, street promenading and...practical jokes" (Warner 10). Mason notes that initially, free people of colour participated in Carnival with the White settlers, but "slaves [were] expressly forbidden to take part" (13). Post emancipation, Carnival went through an "Africanising" process replete with former slaves incorporating drums, flaming torches, stick fighting, sensuous dancing, and African songs (Mason 14). Warner, citing research by literary scholar and critic Gordon Rohlehr, concurs, noting that often the stick fighting morphed into rioting (10). Caribbean Carnival entertained the lower and working classes, which were largely comprised of former slaves and their descendants. In Jean Rhys's autobiography *Smile Please* (1979), she describes watching Afro-Dominicans playing mas<sup>41</sup> from the windows of her family's home in Roseau. According to Rhys, the children in her family "couldn't dress up or join in but [they] could watch from the open window" (52). In those days, Rhys "used to long so fiercely to be black and to dance, too, in the sun, to that music" (53). Her mother's reticence was probably related to her need to maintain distance between her White planter class children and Black, working class, Carnival goers as much as it was for safety reasons. The need to maintain this distance is a result of the pull of class, race, and self-preservation. However, Hope Munro Smith

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<sup>41</sup> Playing mas, or masquerade, refers to participating in the Carnival parades by joining one of the costumed, masquerade bands.

notes that by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Carnival “gradually fell under the financial and aesthetic influence of the ‘colored’ middle class and business owners” (34). This sanitised Carnival aesthetic encouraged “good behaviour and decency, and the suppression of rioting and obscenity” (Munro Smith 34).

Springer’s poetry is heavily influenced by Trinidad’s Carnival and by calypso. Kaiso is not only considered the national music of Trinidad and Tobago specifically, but it is the sound of Carnival. Calypso lacks the overtly revolutionary tone of reggae; calypsonians prefer the subtlety of articulating beyond the margins whether those boundaries are social, political, or cultural. Kaiso song lyrics usually operate in subtleties, and even the most outrageous lyrics are still obscure. Sparrow’s “Congo Man” (1964) is a calypso that exhibits the genre’s skill at working outside of the margins. The implications of the lyrics meant the song was banned from the airwaves for two decades. In the song, the narrator states,

Two white women travelling through Africa  
Find themselves in de hands of a cannibal head hunter  
He cook up one, he eat one raw  
Dey taste so good he wanted more, more!  
He want more!  
*Aye yi yay*  
*I envy de Congo man*  
*I wish it was me ah want to shake he hand*  
*He eat until he stomach upset and I...*  
*Never eat ah white meat yet*

Sparrow's lyrics imply a sexual theme. Specifically, when the African head hunter "eats" the White woman, it could be argued that he is performing oral sex on her. Munro Smith posits that the White women in the lyrics may also be a subtle reference to the White, female tourist who visits the Caribbean, which is referred to as the Congo, and "will give both her money and her body freely" to local Black men and "return home without ever being a burden" (38). Still, the lyrics do not actually state that the head hunter is performing any sexual act, but the implication of the term "eat" in conjunction with the "White woman" was enough for the song to be censored. Calypso lyrics such as these reinforce the "saga boy" or "sweet man" life in which a singer's multiple "women support him financially, emotionally, and sexually" (Munro Smith 38). In this case, the White woman is preferred because she will not become a burden like a local woman, who cannot return home and might demand monogamy or marriage. In addition, racially-based sexual fantasies can be realised in relationships between the Black, Caribbean saga boys and the White, female tourists. Whatever claims can and have been made about this song do not belie the creativity of the lyrics.

What calypso lacks in verbal force it makes up for in skill, creativity, and acuity. Carnival and calypso are Springer's realm, and she is a force in promoting Carnival as a cultural event that helped shape Trinidad and Tobago's history. Springer's commitment to the preservation of Carnival culture and history extend to her written work. In 2004, she composed an extended script commemorating the Canboulay Riots of 1881<sup>42</sup> (Funk par. 7). Springer also wrote *Traditional Carnival Characters of Trinidad and Tobago*—a Carnival-themed colouring book for children including her original poetry. Springer has a strong connection to Carnival culture

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<sup>42</sup> The Canboulay Riots of 1881 occurred when Capt. Baker, British head of Trinidad and Tobago's police force, tried to prevent the revelers from carrying *cannes brulees*, or burning sugar cane, into the parade, which had been a tradition since freed Blacks celebrated their emancipation a year later, on August 1, 1835. Since the riots, the reenactments have been staged annually at the beginning of the Carnival season (Cowley 84-90; Mason 30).

and to calypso as the sound of Carnival; therefore, it is not surprising that her poetry reflects the influences of both Carnival and calypso.

The two poems of relevance to this discussion of spoken word, Caribbean musical influences, migration, and challenging social structures and norms are “London Blues” by Eintou Pearl Springer from her collection *Loving the Skin I’m In* (2005) and “The Arrival of Brighteye” by Jean Binta Breeze from her collection *The Arrival of Brighteye and Other Poems* (2000). The first challenge posed by Springer and Breeze is to the belief that emigration from the Caribbean was largely, if not solely, adult male-driven. This position denies the existence and importance of Caribbean female immigrants in post-WWII Britain by placing more emphasis on male immigrants and their migration experiences. In addition, by focusing more on males who immigrated for economic reasons, this assumption denies the presence in and contributions of female immigrants to the British workforce and their contributions to Black British culture. Second, while the *Empire Windrush* represents a watershed moment in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Caribbean immigration to Britain, it does not represent the only instance. Springer and Breeze show that migration from the Caribbean to Britain was consistent throughout the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not ceasing or slowing down with the arrival of the *Windrush*. Third, Springer and Breeze emphasise on two historically-silenced groups: Caribbean immigrant women and children. Springer addresses the combined influences of race and gender on the relationship between Caribbean immigrant men and women in Britain. Drawing on Trinidad’s February Revolution in 1970<sup>43</sup> and its promise to bring the underserved and underrepresented to the forefront of social dialogues, Springer’s poem points to the ways in which this movement failed Black women; the alienation that Black women experienced from Black men in the aftermath

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<sup>43</sup> Known as the Black Power Revolution and the Black Power Uprising, the February Rebellion took place in the early months of 1970 (Bennett 548-556).

and in the post-revolution diaspora; and emphasises the feelings of disconnection from home caused by the Caribbean male's rejection of the Caribbean female in Europe. Breeze's concern is with immigrant children—specifically, children of immigrants brought to Britain from the Caribbean several years after their mothers migrated. Breeze draws on the experiences of these children, depicting the feelings of abandonment, alienation, and of being unwanted that many of them may have felt after re-joining their mothers, who were possibly strangers to their children after years of separation. Fourth, in reflecting the cultures of calypso and reggae, which are historically male-dominated, Springer and Breeze's poems raise issues relevant to the Caribbean Diaspora, emphasising the use of Caribbean colloquial Englishes and the influences of Caribbean music. "London Blues" and "The Arrival of Brighteye" challenge the position that written poems are more authentic than spoken-word poetry because they emphasise the qualities of spoken language over the formality sometimes associated with written texts. In addition, these poems validate reggae and calypso as art forms able to exert influence on other forms of artistic expression. There is also the perception of reggae and calypso as male-centred productions; however, Springer and Breeze's active participation in regional, spoken-word poetry demonstrate that the genres can be inclusive. The poetry of Springer and Breeze challenge many ideas about the Caribbean immigrant experience in Britain, noting that the immigrants were not all male, adults, or willing to remain abroad long-term. By writing spoken-word poetry, Springer and Breeze also challenge the impression of Caribbean spoken-word poetry as a male-produced and dominated field.

As observed, historical accounts tend to marginalise female immigrants and neglect, or perhaps avoid, juvenile immigrants. In the decades following the arrival of the *Windrush*, attention seems to have turned from Caribbean emigrants to emigrants from other parts of the

Commonwealth. Since the 1990s, immigration debates in Britain have focused more on South Asia than any other region. Today, that attention has shifted to Middle Eastern and North African immigrants. Despite this shift, the poetry of Springer and Breeze draw the attention back to Caribbean immigration to Britain and marginalised groups who emigrated from the region. The speakers in both poems are female; Springer's unnamed speaker is an adult woman and Breeze's narrator, Brighteye, is a female child for most of the poem who matures at the poem's end.

Springer's poem "London Blues" places emphasis on the stories of Caribbean female immigrants in Britain several decades after the arrival of the *Windrush*. Springer's speaker is a Caribbean adult female living in the UK, but no details about her exact age or when she arrived are given. The poem is a one-sided conversation spoken by a Caribbean woman to a man in which the female speaker seems to be in a public place attempting to grab the attention of someone she recognises, not necessarily because they are personally acquainted, but because they share a common historical, cultural, and regional bond. Both male and female characters appear to be Caribbean immigrant archetypes, such as the Commonwealth student-activists in Britain. The poem opens with the speaker saying "Yeow!/Is you!/Yes is you I calling" (Springer lines 1-3). While many Americans and Britons have heard the term "yoo-hoo" when someone is trying to attract their attention in a public place, Caribbeans, especially Trinidadians, are familiar with "Yeow" followed by "Is you I calling" when the caller does not receive immediate acknowledgment. The use of phrases such as this one can help to identify the speaker as a Caribbean but also possibly as a Trinidadian.

Throughout the poem, the speaker reminds her audience that she is female. She is trying to get the attention of a Caribbean male who seems determined to ignore or avoid her to which the speaker states, "Like you doh recognize/is me" (Springer lines 6-7). The speaker reminds her

male audience that she has been “bearing” him “on mih back/in mih belly” (Springer lines 9-11). Here, Springer emphasises the supportive role women have historically played in men’s lives, including this man, who is a Caribbean male representation in the poem. The image of a woman carrying a man on her back draws attention to the burdens that Caribbean women have borne for their families when their men, who were often struggling under the socio-economic issues caused regionally by centuries slavery, indenture, and delayed emancipation, were unable to take on these day-to-day responsibilities. These lines are reminiscent of Zora Neale Hurston’s imagery of African American women expressed by Granny in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). When Granny states, “De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see,” she makes a powerful claim about the responsibilities women of the African Diaspora must assume in the post-slavery societies of the Western Hemisphere (Hurston 17). The comparison between Black women and mules reaffirms that often these women do not attain the position of ‘human’ but are relegated to that of ‘beast’ in many societies.

As there is a possibility of some unknown factor preventing the Black Caribbean man in the poem from recognising her, Springer’s narrator asks him whether

Goat bite me

crapaud<sup>44</sup> pee on me

or is razor blade

ah have

between these legs! (Springer lines 22-26).

These lines bring another image to mind: that of a woman as a monstrosity. Initially, the image is conveyed in a humorous manner when the speaker wonders whether “crapaud pee on me.” The

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<sup>44</sup> Frog

idea of a frog urinating on someone being the cause of such extreme revulsion is amusing, but it also resonates because in certain folktales this occurrence could be ominous. However, as the lines progress, the image shifts to a woman who is reminiscent of a monster. The image of the monstrous woman in conjunction with the Caribbean raises a discussion of Sycorax, the mother of Caliban from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611), who is described as the "blue-eyed hag" by Prospero (1.2.272). Shakespeare and other writers of his time visualised the Caribbean as home to cannibals, witches, and simple-minded natives. In Caribbean narratives with European origins, Sycorax emerges as an evil witch who is banished from what is supposed to be civilisation for her malevolence. In her exile, Sycorax gives birth to another monstrosity, Caliban, who Shakespeare crafts as a physically-deformed, drunken creature whose only purpose is to serve a benevolent European master, Prospero.

While Sycorax exerts some influence on the actions of the play's male characters, she is absent (Blystone 73). Feminist scholar Brittney Blystone posits that "[t]hrough Prospero, Sycorax symbolizes everything that may question patriarchy"; therefore, "Prospero envisions her as his female opposite" (73). As Sycorax is the manifestation of an unknown and absent female power source, she is the antithesis to the White, male, European, Christian, colonising patriarchy that Prospero represents. Women's studies scholar Irene Lara suggests that Sycorax's banishment and absence from *The Tempest* represents "the continuity of dominant cultures' refusal or inability to see and listen to Sycorax" (81). As Sycorax is both female and Other, the 'absent monster' narrative is effective in colonisation narratives by framing Sycorax as unworthy of recognition. This attitude towards the literary character Sycorax is manifested on colonised women of colour—her metaphorical daughters.

Nalo Hopkinson's "Shift" (2002) re-imagines Sycorax, transforming her from an evil witch into a being that is much more powerful and has a connection to African tales and legends. In this story, Sycorax is Mami Wata, Mother Water the Sea Goddess, and she is not a monster. While Hopkinson maintains the storyline of Sycorax's exile from her home in Algiers, Hopkinson also strays from the "blue-eyed hag" theme. Hopkinson's Sycorax is mother to Caliban and Ariel, and, unlike Shakespeare's Sycorax, this one is magnificent as "[s]he has wrapped an ocean wave about her like a shawl"; her "eyes are open-water blue"; her "writhing hair foams white over her shoulders"; and her hips are a tsunami that "overflows her watery seat" (Hopkinson 151). Hopkinson's Sycorax is regal, whereas Shakespeare's Sycorax is simply evil (151). Hopkinson deviates this European patriarchal narrative away from Prospero as he is never mentioned in her story, reframing Sycorax as exiled but also mysteriously appearing at her will. Hopkinson's Sycorax symbolises a "female-centered postcolonial" discourse, furthering "a decolonial feminist politics of solidarity" (Lara 81).

In "London Blues," Springer evokes an image reminiscent of Shakespeare's monstrous witch but also of Hopkinson's regal ocean queen. One element of Springer's monstrous woman that reinforces the horrific image is the suggestion by the narrator of the poem that there is the possibility of razor blades being between her legs—a terrifying reimagining of the vagina dentata myth, which associates female sexuality with sexual danger. While these devices of sexual torture are more than enough to terrify any man, Springer's image of vaginal razor blades serves another purpose. In the poem, Springer uses this image to question why her speaker is repeatedly rejected by a man who symbolises the Caribbean male archetype—the

Political man

artistic man

liberated man

rastafarian man (Springer lines 38-41).

The narrator wants to understand why this man, who is described as an ideal, is rejecting her so completely when there should be a strong connection between them based on their shared history of colonisation and oppression. The poem's narrator is addressing a man who should at least recognise her as someone from 'home' but pretends not to know her because there is something appalling about her. This longing for a reconnection prompts the narrator to ask whether she has razor blades between her legs after her obvious and public rejection. Despite this rejection and the feelings of self-loathing it creates, the speaker is still a Caribbean female immigrant in Britain; therefore, the poem demonstrates that Caribbean women immigrated and at times they migrated alone and outside the confines of family groups.

Within Springer's focus on the Caribbean man, whose rejection of the Caribbean woman she interrogates, there are also elements of fighting back and moving forward in the poem. The narrator, in her confrontation with this archetypal man, states that this man is "ready/to disown me/for sleeping wid who/you call/the enemy" (Springer lines 61-65). These lines expose the hypocrisy that at times raised issues within the Black Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Black women were expected to serve the movement and be supportive of the men within it, bearing these men metaphorically on their backs. Their contributions notwithstanding, these women often felt the sting of being relegated to subservient roles although they were more than capable of leading. Historian Tracey A. Matthews believes that in Black nationalist organisations like the Black Panther Party's (BPP) "theory and praxis" regarding "gender and sexuality should be viewed as an ongoing, non-linear process" affecting internal and external factors (232). Matthews suggests that male Panthers were as varied as Black men in America and

other White-majority societies; therefore, their attitudes towards women in the movement and party reflected both liberated and misogynist views on gender. However, others like Maulana Karenga, founder of the US organisation, proposed that “women’s complementary and unequal roles” are symbolic of “‘traditional’ African gender relations” pre-colonisation (White 75). Historian E. Frances White’s research on some Black nationalist thought reveals an open hostility from within this group “to any feminist agenda” (75). At times, Black nationalism offered solutions to racial injustice that marginalised Black women by placing them in subservient roles while possibly creating an emotional disconnect between male and female Black nationalists.

In addition, Springer raises issues of interpersonal relationships and affection in “London Blues.” She seems to question where Black women were supposed to find love and affection if “black man/fighting/to get under/dey [White women] frock” (Springer lines 48-51). Literary scholar Ifeona Fulani, citing the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, notes that the “compulsive power of the colonial ‘desiring machine’ traps white/English women and black/West Indian men” in an “interlocking and dynamic web of libidinal and consumerist impulses” (85). In these socio-sexual situations and imperial settings, the Black male body as a site of desire is commodified by White women. Springer presents another perspective of these interracial sexual relationships in which the Black male is the hunter, which is reminiscent of Sparrow’s “Congo Man.” While Black male immigrants in Britain actively pursue White women, Black women move on and have relationships with men from other races. The narrator indicates that she has had relationships with White men, who the Black man calls “enemy,” yet she has been rejected by “you/who chirren mudder/like me/who have mudder like me” (Springer lines 57-60). By referencing the man’s mother and his children’s mother, the narrator is not only

attempting to remind him of his connection to other Black women but is creating a link between her skin and those of women he has, or had, some affection for in the past. The rationale is that if he loved these women, he could at least acknowledge her.

The narratives of Caribbean immigration to Britain have historically been concerned with adult immigrants; however, Breeze's "The Arrival of Brighteye" is initially narrated by a Caribbean child immigrant. Breeze's speaker, Brighteye, describes living in Jamaica with her grandmother while her mother works in England. Brighteye's mother living and working away from home raises the topic of transnational mothering, which is a common theme in other Caribbean texts, such as Patricia Powell's *Me Dyin Trial* (2003), Velma Pollard's "My Mother" (1989), and Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) (Alexander 1). Literary scholar Nancy Kang, citing Charmaine Crawford, observes that Caribbean women and "other women in the African Diaspora view motherhood and mothering as a collective rather than a solitary or private act" (702). Transnational mothering fits this idea of collective mothering as it relies on communally mothering a child whose biological mother is absent. Brighteye's mother can be classified as a transnational migrant labourer because she leaves her home country to work, sending remittances home to support her child. Sociologists Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila classify women who mother their children from a distance, which can be characterized by a border separation, as engaging in the act of transnational motherhood (318). Transnational mothering has, since the 1990s, become a more recognised topic in sociological studies. Largely, research in this field has focused on Latin American women who migrate to the US; these mothers leave behind children who are cared for by 'other' mothers, such as grandmothers, aunts, godmothers, or women who are not biologically related to the children. Contemporary migration studies are now inclusive of women from other regions, such as Asia

and Africa, who are increasingly becoming the subjects of research on transnational mothering and the importance of other mothers in maintaining kinship ties. However, research on transnational mothering in the Caribbean remains a marginally-examined topic; work in this field is still in its infancy.

Merle Hodge also addresses transnational parenting in *Crick Crack, Monkey* (1970) but with a single father who immigrates to the US in the 1950s after he is widowed to support his children. He leaves his children, Tee and Codran, with an ‘other’ mother named Tante, who cared for several children left behind by their mothers. Tante takes responsibility for these children most likely because she has a natural attachment to children but also perhaps because she does not have biological children. Therefore, two emotional needs are met: the need to mother and the need to be mothered. Tante assumes the daily care, financial responsibility, and emotional support for Tee and Codran without any expectations, and, in the novel, Hodge introduces a character, Mikey, who is child that Tante also surrogate mothers. In the storyline, Mikey’s biological mother immigrates to a country with a more sustainable economy but neither sends for him nor remittances to support him. Tante fills an absence in Mikey’s life, and there is a loving, mother-son relationship between Tante and Mikey, who later immigrates to help Tante financially support the other children. Mikey’s act of sacrifice demonstrates the depth of his feelings for Tante as his ‘other’ mother and the significance of the role she played in his life when his biological mother could not or would not maintain their mother-child relationship.

Caribbean transnational, migrant, working mother and child immigration are addressed in Breeze’s poem “The Arrival of Brighteye.” At the beginning of the poem, Brighteye states,

My mommy gone over de ocean

My mommy gone over de sea

She gawn dere to work for some money

An den she gawn sen back for me (Breeze lines 1-4).

Breeze, through Brighteye's observations, articulates the realities of transnational mothering in which the mother from the developing world must leave home. She is pulled to a more sustainable economy that allows her to provide effective financial support for her children but only if she is willing to leave them. In "The Arrival," the border separation creating this transnational migrant mother situation is illustrated by the lines "My mommy gone over de ocean" and "My mommy gone over the sea." The terms "ocean" and "sea" give some indication of the magnitude of the distance between mother and child. Brighteye's statement "She gawn dere to work for some money" clarifies the reality of a mother working to support her child. The idea of going away to earn a living is the purpose of transnational migration. When Brighteye states that her mother "gawn sen back for" her, she is dealing with staggered or serial migration. Psychologists Andrea Smith et al refer to a parent migration later followed by child migration as a "staggered pattern of immigration or serial migration" (108). Studies indicate that in the Caribbean serial immigration is common but more so in single-parent families (Smith et al 108). This serial pattern of immigration is demonstrated when Brighteye's mother leaves Jamaica first and sends for her later. Brighteye's mother, who previously immigrated, can send for her because now she is more acclimatised to her surroundings. Often, parents participate in serial migration because of the "uncertainties and economic costs associated with starting a new life for a family in a new country (Smith et al 109). Despite the thought and concern for family motivating serial migration, children may feel abandoned by their parents or suffer anxiety after separation from caregivers (Smith et al 110).

Breeze has much in common with the transnational mother that she writes about in “The Arrival” as she has lived in England for six months out of every year from 1985 to 2014. She only returned home to Jamaica for a longer period after suffering blood clots in her lungs that caused two strokes in 2013 (Reckford par. 1). Regarding her time in England Breeze stated, “[t]he necessity for me to be in England is purely economic” (with Sharpe 609). Breeze’s comment puts a face, name, and true story to the need for mothers from less economically-developed or stable regions becoming transnational migrant workers, and “The Arrival,” following in this tradition of mothering from away, is another chapter in the story of Caribbean female migration to Britain.

Sociologists Nancy S. Landale et al observe that of the many risk factors posed to immigrant families, the separation of parents and children is the factor with the greatest implications to children, sometimes leading to miring “children in poverty and unstable living arrangements” (43). There are also emotional risk factors posed to children by a mother becoming a transnational migrant worker. A sharper image of the reality of transnational migrant mothering is provided in “The Arrival” when Brighteye states, “soon six year come,” indicating the number of years that her mother has been gone (Breeze line 10). Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila observe that in “some cases, the separation of time and distance are substantial; 10 years may elapse before women are reunited with their children” (317). Brighteye wonders, “supposin I forget her” because her mother has been gone since she was a year old (Breeze line 12). This concern is valid as in the poem no mention is made of pictures of Brighteye or her mother being exchanged over the years, begging the question of how a child can be expected to remember a mother that she only knew in the first year of her life. Brighteye, who is a precocious child, is not convinced that either mother or daughter will recognise each other although “granny seh it don’t

matter” (Breeze line 11). Granny, Brighteye’s ‘other’ mother, tries to convince the child that time and distance are not important and that she and her mother will know each other perhaps on some deeper level than facial recognition. However, when Brighteye finally arrives in England, she disembarks from the ship, breaking into a run because she thinks that she recognises her mother. There is a lady on the dock with “a big red white an blue umbrella” (Breeze line 74). The colours of the umbrella convince Brighteye that this woman is her mother because her mother sent her a “red white an blue” dress for her seventh birthday on Christmas Eve (Breeze line 21). Brighteye, with a child’s hope, believes that her mother is waiting on the Southampton dock to greet her rather than in the London train station. When Brighteye approaches the woman who she takes to be her mother, she finds that the woman “is a white white woman...wid white white hair...an is nat [her] madda at all” (Breeze lines 86-87). Brighteye does not remember her mother, so she hopes that her mother will give her a sign—some little signal that she can use to recognise a woman she has not seen for six years and does not remember. When Brighteye sees the red, white, and blue umbrella, which are the same colours as her birthday dress, she believes that her mother is not only waiting on the dock but that her mother has given her a special sign. One of the realities addressed in the poem is that Brighteye is a displaced child who is looking for home through reconnecting with her mother because from the minute they reconnect in Waterloo station, Brighteye designates her mother as “mih home” (Breeze line 126).

Enoch Powell’s “Rivers of Blood” speech describes immigrant children as “wide-grinning piccaninnies” (par. 35). These children posed a threat to English conservatives, not only because of their “terrifying” aspects, but because, according to Powell, for every “20 or 30 immigrant children” who were “arriving from overseas...every week” in the 1960s, there was a strong likelihood of their reproducing as adults, which meant “15 or 20 additional families [of

immigrant origins] a decade or two hence” (par. 16). Breeze’s “The Arrival” provides a response to Powell’s comments. Powell was concerned solely with the arrival and residence of immigrant children but neither with the children themselves nor the long-term economic ramifications of empire and decolonisation that necessitated their parents’ migration. However, children like Brighteye were in a precarious situation because they were being reunited with parents that they, essentially, did not know and brought to a country in which they were not welcome. At times, they were also placed at the mercy of social systems that were incapable of addressing their needs<sup>45</sup>. Brighteye symbolises all of the immigrant children who arrived in Britain both during and after the *Windrush* period. They were not the threats that Powell imagined or portrayed them to be but victims of the decolonisation process, more than the adults, European and non-European, caught in its tentacles.

When Brighteye realizes that the woman on the dock is not her mother, she thinks  
ah want to wee wee...but in de sea...ah want to wee wee  
till all a mi run out...till all ah mi run out...all de way back  
home...all de way back home...to my Granny (Breeze lines 91-93).

These lines of Breeze’s are reminiscent of the Mother Goose rhyme “This Little Piggy” in which the last little piggy cries “Wee, wee, wee all the way home.” The use of the popular Mother Goose rhyme emphasises a childhood innocence through Brighteye’s simple, yet impossible, desire to go home. On some level, she must know that she cannot go “all de way back home...to [her] Granny.” Yet, as a child who has just lost every familiar person and place only to land in tan unfamiliar environment all alone, Brighteye can only express this heartfelt desire using a language that is both familiar and comforting—that of the nursery rhyme. Breeze merges

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<sup>45</sup> See the discussion of Beryl Gilroy’s *In Praise of Love and Children* (1996).

Brighteye's very physical need to relieve herself with her emotional need to go home to her Granny. For Brighteye, Granny not only symbolises home but stability, which is what children need in order to acquire confidence and independence as they grow and mature. The reality of her mother not being on the docks and the appearance of the White woman under the red, white, and blue umbrella suggests that Brighteye is not moving towards a home in the true sense and provides some proof that her migration to England will destabilise her.

Powell's commentary on immigrant children was undoubtedly racist and xenophobic, and he never hints at the possibility that these children are more victims of circumstance than the White Britons with whom he is concerned in this speech. In this poem, Breeze shows that immigrant children are not the grinning threats that Powell and his supporters imagine them to be but real children who were separated from their mothers, often for years at a time, and who did not necessarily want to immigrate to Britain. Breeze demonstrates that children like Brighteye suffer multiple displacements. They are first emotionally distanced from their migrant worker mothers, who abandon them to provide for them. Then, they are physically displaced from the only home that they know and the people they rely upon in their mothers' absences. Then, they immigrate to new countries and into families in which they will remain strangers. While in the host country, in addition to adapting to a new home and social environment, immigrant children are also "mourning the loss of their caregivers" (Smith et al 110). Prior research by John Bowlby suggests that the child's age at the time of separation determines the level of attachment to the absent parent and the outcome of reunification (quoted in Smith et al 108). Bowlby raises a valid point, but his research does not consider a child's attachment to other caregivers and the emotional impact of this new separation. This wave of solitary child immigration to Britain from the Caribbean occurred in the wake of the *Windrush* arrival, further emphasising child

immigration and continuous Caribbean immigration after the *Windrush*, which Springer's poem addresses.

The exact timeframe of Springer's "London Blues" is significant because, if it is set several decades after the arrival of the *Empire Windrush*, it indicates that Caribbean immigration to Britain did not abruptly end with the *Windrush's* arrival. The poem also has a clear political tone, which is revealed throughout the text with subtle references to Black Nationalism and revolution in the Caribbean. The Caribbean is mentioned specifically when the speaker states "Even in the Caribbean," (Springer line 80). In the next lines, the narrator states,

you telling me

if you eh red

you dead (Springer lines 82-84).

Here, "red" could refer to socialist movements that were at the heart of Caribbean revolutions such as the Cuban Revolution in 1959 (Ruiz 546). While the Caribbean has a long history of revolutions and rebellions going back to the onset of African chattel slavery, Springer's poem points to more recent Caribbean revolutions in the post-independence period and to Afro-Caribbean, Black Nationalist movements.

There are a few instances of Black nationalistic revolutions occurring in the Caribbean after independence. In Trinidad, the February Rebellion took place from February to April 21, 1970 (Bennett 551). Led by Makandal Daaga, formerly Geddes Granger, the February Rebellion was a response to what was viewed as ineffectual leadership by PM Eric Williams and his political party, the People's National Movement (PNM) (Bennett 549). Grenada's revolution on March 13, 1979 shifted government control from PM Eric Matthew Gairy to Maurice Bishop, who was then assassinated on October 19, 1983, four days before the American invasion of the

island (Heine 557). The assassination of Walter Rodney of Guyana on June 13, 1980 was supposed to prevent the initiation of a revolution although there is no concrete evidence proving that Rodney intended to overthrow the government. When Springer writes “you keep the revolution/waiting,” she is suggesting the possibility of another revolution, continuing where those aborted revolutions were suspended (lines 128-129). Springer is also giving another indication of the poem’s timeframe. The Caribbean revolutions mentioned are post-independence events that occurred in the 1970s and the early 1980s. In addition, Springer was in England from 1985 to 1986 to attend graduate school in library science and the poem is set in London, which, if examined in conjunction with the historical periods of the revolutions, could suggest that the poem is contemporaneous to her own experiences overseas (Springer and Alexander “Interview”).

Breeze’s “The Arrival of Brighteye” represents another wave of Caribbean immigration to Britain in the decades following the arrival of the *Windrush*. Crucial Films and BBC TV commissioned the poem, which was then broadcast in 1998 during the fiftieth-year anniversary of the *Windrush* arrival (Breeze 6). While it is difficult to state the exact timeframe of the poem, it most likely begins either in the 1950s or 1960s and spans approximately forty years as Brighteye is a grandmother at the end and her mother is returning to Jamaica for retirement. “The Arrival,” with other poems from the collection including “Baptism,” “Faith,” and “A Cold Coming,” form a narrative, and in these poems, the speaker is first person. The speaker, Faith, and Brighteye could be contemporaries of Breeze, who was born in 1956. If they are around the same age and Brighteye immigrated when she was seven years old, she would have arrived in England in 1963.

Breeze gives a few more clues about the timeframe of “The Arrival” in the poem. For example, Brighteye arrives in England by ship and takes a train to London. Air Jamaica was not launched until 1969<sup>46</sup> and before that other airlines such as Pan Am<sup>47</sup> flew between Jamaica and the US not the UK. In addition, air travel, which was relatively new in the Caribbean until the late 1960s, was probably considerably more expensive than sea travel and Brighteye’s mother is gone for six years before she can afford to send for Brighteye by ship. There is also the man that Brighteye refers to as “Daddy,” who “married [her] mother when she came to Englan” (Breeze line 110). According to Brighteye, “dat time im was working overtime/wid de British rail” (Breeze lines 112-113). British Rail was officially established in 1948<sup>48</sup>, and there was active recruitment of Caribbeans to work in Britain post WWII (Lima 59). Perhaps her stepfather was a *Windrush* immigrant, who came to work for British Rail. Six years pass before Brighteye arrives in England after her mother, placing the setting of “The Arrival” in decades following the *Windrush*’s arrival, and it is likely that the poem means to include Brighteye in one of the post-*Windrush* immigrant generations.

“The Arrival” suggests that after the *Windrush*, Caribbean emigration was serial with one family member migrating then other family members following. Once a family member migrated, it became easier for other family members to immigrate because they were no longer entering the unknown. The new immigrants had family members to help smooth their transition and sometimes they even had access to accommodation when they arrived. Therefore, “The Arrival” commemorates not only the onset of child emigration from the Caribbean to Britain but the migration of Caribbean families to Britain. The migration of the wives and children of

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<sup>46</sup> For more information, see “Air Jamaica: End of an Era” in the *Jamaica Observer*, July 8, 2011.

<sup>47</sup> For more information, see “History of Aviation in Jamaica” by Rebecca Tortello in *The Gleaner*, “Pieces of the Past” series, Dec. 5, 2005.

<sup>48</sup> For more information, see “History of British Rail” at [rail.co.uk/british-railway-history/british-rail/](http://rail.co.uk/british-railway-history/british-rail/)

migrant workers changed the image of British immigration from the single Caribbean male to the Caribbean family. In contrast, “London Blues” exhibits another evolution in Caribbean immigration to Britain in which the single woman becomes the face of migration. During the *Windrush* period, single women were not encouraged to immigrate to Britain, but they were not actively prevented. With Indian immigration to the Caribbean during the indenture period, there were concerns about attracting the ‘wrong type’ of woman, and single Indian women were prevented from immigrating. Perhaps British authorities held a similar view of unaccompanied, single Caribbean women. Based on the content of Springer’s poem, Caribbean immigration in the 1980s was no longer single men or families; single women migrated and possibly in significant numbers. Both “London Blues” and “The Arrival of Brighteye,” by focusing on single immigrant women and immigrant children, respectively, not only point to continued migration from the Caribbean to Britain in the decades following the arrival of the *Windrush*, but also place more emphasis on the stories of two groups that research and migration studies have often overlooked. Springer and Breeze also rely on elements of Caribbean culture to tell the story of Caribbean girls and women who immigrated to England.

Calypso and reggae, as stated previously, should not be identified solely as musical genres but also as cultural codes because both styles utilise specific “symbols and systems of meaning that are relevant to a particular culture,” which in this case is the culture of the entire Caribbean but Trinidad and Jamaica specifically (Hyatt and Simons 173). Springer and Breeze employ the cultural codes of calypso and reggae, respectively, in their poems by utilising two Caribbean Creole Englishes, Trinidadian and Jamaican; neither poet places emphasis on any regional, standard, academic English. In addition, in contrast to many of their regional predecessors, particularly those writing during the colonial period, there is little attempt to mimic

the language of British poetry. Instead, Springer and Breeze promote the use of local Creole languages that are familiar to general audiences, and the languages used appeal to all educational levels in their respective societies rather than reaching only the most educated listeners.

The use of Caribbean Creole languages in Springer's and Breeze's poems, in addition to appealing to wider, regional audiences, serves the purpose of reclaiming these languages from the margins of linguistic studies where they have been relegated for much the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The prior status of Creole languages was due, in large part, to their history within colonisation and chattel slavery. Kamau Brathwaite posits that West African languages, when they were initially brought to the Caribbean by the captured Africans, were submerged by the European colonial languages English, Spanish, French, and Dutch (7). Languages spoken by ethnic groups such as the Ashanti, Congolese, and Yoruba took on an inferior status much like their speakers (Brathwaite 7). Several Caribbean linguistic scholars<sup>49</sup> have worked to retrieve Caribbean languages, particularly Creoles, from the margins and from the pejorative connotation associated with their classification as 'dialects'. Still, it was only in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that Creole languages attained the recognition they deserve as valid and effective forms of communication.

Throughout the poem "London Blues," Springer includes several Trinidadian Creole terms familiar to regional speakers. The term "crapaud," which is used throughout the poem, is a common Creole term in Trinidad. The island, during its period as a Spanish colony, was home to French settlers, which continued after its capture by the British in 1797. The island's history of French settlement makes the use of this specific term understandable given the influence the

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<sup>49</sup> For more information, see Velma Pollard's *From Jamaican Creole to Standard English: A Handbook for Teachers* (1994); Mervin Alleyne's "Acculturation and the Cultural Matrix of Creolization" in *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages* (edited by Dell Hymes); or Maureen Warner-Lewis' *Creolisation Processes in Linguistic, Artistic and Material Cultures* (2002).

French colonials must have exerted on their slaves, who comprised most of the island's population at 10,009 or 56.7% in 1797 (Fraser 149). In addition, Springer uses several common, everyday Creole terms that are typically spoken in conversations, such as “de” (the), “Ah/ah” (I, a), “dey” (they), “wid” (with), “dis” (this), and “eh” (typically what; here did not). These terms seem to have their roots in British English and perhaps also in the many West African languages spoken by the slaves. There is also the strong possibility that Trinidadian Creole bears some resemblance to the languages of the Arawaks and Caribs who first inhabited the islands and to the Spanish spoken by the conquistadors who captured the islands from the indigenous populations.

In addition to Brathwaite's research on the influences or impositions of colonial languages, his work on Caribbean languages identifies four groups: English, Creole English, nation language, and ancestral languages (5-6). The lexicon used by Springer in “London Blues” can be classified as a nation language, which Brathwaite defines as “the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean...the language of slaves and labourers” (5). While nation language is closely associated with chattel slavery, indenture, and other forms of forced labour, it maintains its utility in the contemporary Caribbean. In “London Blues,” the use of a nation language gives the narrator the ability to connect the poem's characters to Springer's audience. When the narrator asks, “What happen/I doh look like woman/ah doh feel/like woman,” the interrogatory nature of the lines as well as the narrator's confusion at being rejected are effectively conveyed through the use of nation language (Springer lines 18-21).

As with Springer's “London Blues,” nation language is used throughout “The Arrival of Brighteye.” The difference between the use of nation language in the two poems is that Springer uses Trinidadian nation language whereas Breeze uses Jamaican nation language. Contemporary

Jamaican nation language exhibits the influence of only two European languages, English and Spanish. Jamaica was an occupied Spanish colony for almost two hundred years before being captured by the British in 1655. Therefore, Spanish has a stronger and more established influence on Jamaican nation language than it does on Trinidadian nation language. In addition, the Arawaks in Jamaica were enslaved for at least two centuries before the importation of African slaves. A close examination of Jamaican nation language may reveal the presence of Arwakan/Lokono throughout the lexicon. Lastly, as calypso and Trinidadian nation language influence each other, it is safe to assume that reggae and Jamaican nation language work in a similar manner, making both instrumental in Jamaican poetry, such as “The Arrival.”

Throughout “The Arrival,” the impact of Jamaica’s reggae music culture is clear and, while Breeze does not always embrace the sobriquet “dub poet,” her poetry could be classified as dub. Literary scholar Joseph McLaren notes that the use of vernacular by dub poets is not “a reactionary device, but...a progressive, liberating voice of the dispossessed” (104). There are nine free-verse stanzas in the poem, and the remainder of the poem is organised into eleven free-verse sections. Some of these large sections are divided into sentences, whereas other sections are in a stream-of-consciousness format. It has already been stated that in “The Arrival” Brighteye, an immigrant child, describes the process involved in moving from Jamaica to England essentially alone. Brighteye also expresses her emotional displacement in the poem, which can be described as traumatic as in this process she not only loses a physical home but her emotional anchors. First, Brighteye is separated from her grandmother when her mother in England sends for her. While Brighteye has a physical home with her grandmother, she also has a sense of security. She knows that her grandmother is taking care of her and is a constant presence in her life. Separation from her grandmother represents Brighteye’s first loss at age

seven; however, the loss of her grandmother does not affect Brighteye in the poem until she arrives in England. Her mother is not waiting for her on the docks, and she mistakes a White woman with a red, white, and blue umbrella for her mother. It is then that Brighteye wishes to go “all de way back/home...all de way back home...to my Granny” (Breeze lines 92-93). Brighteye’s use of the possessive pronoun “my” referencing her grandmother is significant in reinforcing the loss of her first mother.

When Brighteye turns ten in England, her grandmother passes away and she completely loses the security and sense of home that her grandmother represents. At this point, Brighteye states “Ah never see mi Granny again,” perhaps also meaning that she will never see home again as Granny is her last remaining anchor to Jamaica (Breeze line 102). When Granny dies, Brighteye “crying to go wid mamma” back to Jamaica while her new, younger siblings “playing all de time” (Breeze line 107). Brighteye’s acknowledgement of her younger siblings also clarifies elements of immigrant child life. They were not always migrating to join two biological parents but at times were the children of previous relationships being sent for perhaps more out of guilt and obligation than love and attachment. The presence of siblings born in the new country may cause some jealousy (Smith et al 111). A child immigrant with new siblings may feel unwanted or less wanted than the child born in the host country into a two-parent family.

In the Anglophone Caribbean, children born of extramarital relationships are often referred to as ‘outside children’, and these children are typically outcasts in their families and are rarely welcomed into intact families once their parents marry new partners. It takes Brighteye’s mother six years to send for her, the child she had with a man who immigrated to America to do farm work. In that six-year period, she marries and has two other children who are English and have no connection to Jamaica or Granny. These English-born children represent the second

generation, which was born in England and is completely disconnected from the countries of their parents' birth. The section that describes Brighteye's longing to return to Jamaica at Granny's death also introduces her stepfather, who she describes as "ready to beat mi" when she cries to return to Jamaica with her mother for Granny's funeral (Breeze lines 111). There is an element of this stepfather's relationship with Brighteye that raises some suspicions as he seems annoyed by this displaced child crying for her deceased grandmother—the woman who essentially reared her in the absence of her biological mother.

The fact that Brighteye's stepfather is so quick to attempt to beat her gives some indication of the treatment outside children who then became child immigrants received when they left home to re-join their parents. Smith et al conclude that "the emigrant child may be rejected by the stepparent" (107). Brighteye's stepfather accuses this child of disturbing his rest, stating that "troo [Brighteye] im can't sleep or res in peace" as if Brighteye is solely responsible for the extra work he must do to keep his family financially afloat in England (Breeze line 114). Her stepfather not only resents Brighteye's presence but the cost of her support when he "say if im don't provide/more for [her] dan Granny ever could" (Breeze lines 111-112). However, Brighteye stated earlier that her mother "gone over de ocean...to work for some money" to send home to Granny for Brighteye, raising questions about Daddy's claims of supporting Brighteye (Breeze lines 1 and 3). In England Brighteye is, at ten years old, made responsible for her younger half siblings and is at the mercy of an angry stepfather. This new residence is neither entirely safe nor stable for a child; it is a place to live, but it is not 'home'. Brighteye's new home in England is not like the home that Granny created for her, which is probably one more reason why Brighteye is inconsolable when Granny dies.

When Brighteye is an adult and “jus want to be Brighteye again,” her mother decides to move back to Jamaica (Breeze line 136). Brighteye states that “from de day she meet me off de train in Waterloo...she was mi home” (Breeze lines 127 and 126). When Brighteye arrives in England, her mother takes Granny’s place as her emotional anchor and her representation of home. However, Brighteye admits that in her childhood when she was Brighteye, it was “hard”; the implication is that her life was not as difficult in Jamaica as in England (Breeze line 136). The poem suggests that the dream of immigration, even from the perspective of a child, should not be dismissed as a painless transition simply because the subject is a child or because there is an assumption that children’s lives are less stressful than adults’. Transitions are complex and can cause emotional strain to an adult or to a child, and this idea is conveyed subtly throughout the poem. Brighteye lost her first home at seven because of her mother, stating “she bring mi here an tell mi is home” (Breeze line 125). When Brighteye becomes an adult, she states that “mamma/leaving me” to return to Jamaica where she will feel more comfortable (Breeze lines 124-125). Essentially, Brighteye’s mother abandoned her at the age of one year then again years later. After forcing Brighteye into a new, and somewhat unwelcoming, home, she states that her mother is “leaving mi here wid de children an grandchildren” (Breeze line 132). Brighteye wonders “how ah going to hole everting, how I going to hole/dem up” (Breeze 133-134). This second abandonment by her mother leaves Brighteye lost and displaced once more because, while she would like to return to Jamaica, she cannot leave her own children and grandchildren. Also, there is the issue of where Brighteye belongs when she states, “ah don’t belong/here, but ah don’t belong dere eider” (Breeze lines 121-122). Brighteye is trapped by family obligations and by the fact that she “doh remember/nobody, an all who would remember [her] dead or gawn” in Jamaica (Breeze lines 122-123). These lines sum up the predicament that immigrant

children may face if they, at any point in the years following their migrations, decide to return home. While the physical 'home' is still there, all of the emotional attachments may not be, making this transition as difficult, if not more, than the first.

Springer's "London Blues" and Breeze's "The Arrival of Brighteye" challenge the popular image of the Caribbean adult, male immigrant in Britain popularised by texts such as the immigrant-themed novels of Sam Selvon and George Lamming by creating and giving voices to characters who are not only female, but convey the full range of their experiences as immigrants. For the speaker in "London Blues," there is the disconnection between men and women of colour in a diaspora. Whereas she recognises and acknowledges him, he refuses to reciprocate, avoiding the woman whose mere presence reminds him of a life that he wants to forget, or perhaps she unwittingly disrupts the new life that he is desperately trying to construct. Throughout "London Blues," the topics of remembering, connections, and the intersection of race and gender are consistently raised. The Black Caribbean man is asked to remember the Black Caribbean woman, not just as a lover, but perhaps also as a friend, a comrade in the struggle, and as someone who has carried him, which the narrator describes as "bearing wid you/and bearing you/on mih back/in mih belly/for 500 years" (Springer lines 8-12). The statement "500 years" not only references memory but a historical connection that Caribbean men and women share, which should transcend any experiences they have or struggles they encounter as immigrants in Britain. Race and gender significantly impact the immigrant experience in Britain. While Afro-Caribbean men can have interracial relationships, Afro-Caribbean women face some social and/or familial judgment when they do. However, the narrator reminds the Caribbean man "You ha the feeling/that when you ready/to come home/You go find me waiting" (Springer lines 109-112). The expectation is that the Caribbean woman will wait patiently for a man to recognise her

worth and acknowledge her physical beauty although he is “running dong/the white woman/in dis town!” (Springer lines 42-44). Throughout the poem, Springer suggests that there is a valorisation of White, European beauty that is not based on “sincere loving” (line 101). Instead, Caribbean men pursue relationships with White English women because it “is only the historical/breaking/of that taboo” they seek (Springer lines 102-104).

“The Arrival of Brighteye,” told from the first-person perspective of a young child, conveys the pain and loss that immigrant children may feel not only during the actual process of migrating but long-term after settling. Immigrant children may be struck by the realisation that they were essentially abandoned by their parents. These children, like Brighteye, were separated from parents they only knew through monthly remittances and seasonal gifts. They struggle with memory, suggesting that immigrant children may experience some internal turmoil because they are like Brighteye who, “can’t remember [her] madda face at all” (Breeze line 43). Immigrant children are pained by having to leave the only home and loved ones they know. For Brighteye, her home is in Jamaica with Granny—her maternal grandmother and ‘other’ mother. When Brighteye first arrives in England disoriented, her only wish is to go “all de way back home...to [her] Granny” (Breeze line 93). Jamaica represents familiarity and Granny is safety and security. Another major issue that immigrant children face is settling into a new family that may include a parent, a stepparent, and half-siblings who are natural-born citizens in the host country. For Brighteye, the family dynamic includes a stepfather who is angry at having to work “overtime wid de British rail” to provide for a child to whom he has no biological attachment (Breeze line 113). Brighteye hints that her stepfather may be aggressive toward her at times, which is an experience that she was unfamiliar with living in Jamaica with Granny. In addition, newly-arrived Brighteye represents an intrusion into an intact, nuclear family, placing her slightly

outside the family unit and unable to fit into it. Perhaps for an immigrant child, the issue of adapting to a new family may be more stressful than leaving home or entering a new country because the concepts of ‘home’ and ‘family’ carry with them the expectations of safety and comfort while these factors may not be elements of the immigrant child’s new life. In addition, parents often assume that children will forget or that these changes will have little effect, but children rarely forget and major life changes can be as disruptive to a child as to an adult.

Eintou Pearl Springer’s and Jean Binta Breeze’s poems are storytelling texts that challenge popular notions about the immigrants coming to England in the decades following the arrival of the *Empire Windrush*. Springer and Breeze give backchat in their immigrant poetry, using this medium to express concern with the stories of those immigrants who were not accounted for in many of the narratives from the *Windrush* period and after. Those stories seem focused on Caribbean male immigrants—predominantly those from Jamaica—and rarely were women, children, or families accounted for in these narratives. The poetry of Springer and Breeze demonstrate the influences of calypso and reggae, respectively, which enables their work to reach wider audiences but also challenges the notion that poetic forms that are not heavily influenced by European—particularly English—styles should be marginalised or that they are not worthy of being included in a canon. With the influences of calypso and reggae, Springer and Breeze manage to challenge these notions and place emphasis on the work of other migrant artists and writers from the Caribbean.

## Conclusion

When silence is  
Abdication of word tongue and lip  
Ashes of once in what was  
..... Silence  
Song word speech  
Might I ... like Philomela ... sing  
continue  
over  
into  
..... pure utterance.  
from “She Tries Her Tongue” by Marlene Nourbese Philip

Backchat is a term that has followed this writer from Brooklyn, New York; to Valsayn, Trinidad; to Houston, Texas; to Doha, Qatar; and to all the points in between. By the ripe age of 18 months, this author was told that she was well-versed in the art of ‘giving backchat’, which was a form of self-expression consistent with female members of the Caribbean societies, families, and cultures that were particularly influential on this author’s developing years. In social and familial situations, regional girls and young women are encouraged to be silent; therefore, any attempts at interrogatory speech are immediately labelled as ‘giving backchat’—particularly if the questions are directed at a rigid social, cultural, or familial structure. Girls and young women are expected to acquiesce to the request to ‘be seen and not heard’, which is met with immediate approval, whereas the opposite could result in public humiliation, banishment, or, as bell hooks describes in *Talking Back* (1989), corporal punishment. Silence is required, and no other options are available or allowed. This tendency to being acquiescent—accepting imposed silence—seems the norm for regional girls and young women, while the desire to speak and demand to be heard seems like an aberration in Caribbean societies, cultures, and families. However, an examination of Caribbean female texts reveals that giving backchat is a common form of self-expression among this group, providing a way to claim one’s right to be included, to

challenge and question norms, and to upset any existing gender-biased status quos. Giving backchat has never been a deviation from the norm but a way of interrogating and possibly altering the norm, and this dissertation offers examples of giving backchat as a Caribbean female norm. Throughout, an analysis of giving backchat in autobiography, novels, and poetry by Caribbean female writers who come in direct contact with the British Empire by immigrating, migrating, or residing in the UK. This dissertation has demonstrated that giving backchat is a form of gendered speech that can raise awareness about imbalances in societies, families, and cultures.

The research on and discussion of Caribbean female migrant autobiography in this dissertation provided examples of how giving backchat can be incorporated into a personal narrative. In the Caribbean female autobiography, giving backchat involves stating what *should not* be said by marginalised women who are usually encouraged to be silent. Of the three authors examined, Mary Prince seems to provide the best example of giving backchat. Essentially, Prince's narrative is that of a slave who refuses to be silenced—consistently affirming her right as a human being to be heard and to be free. Despite her oppressive owners and their repeated attempts to discredit her once her narrative was released, Prince was steadfast in her determination to tell her story and incorporate an abolitionist message throughout. When she states, "I will say the truth to English people who may read this history," Prince is giving backchat (38). She is stating that regardless of the outcome, she will be honest and open about the events that occurred in her life and in the lives of other slaves she encounters like French Hetty. As a Black, female, Caribbean slave, Prince seems to be the first British author to transform autobiographical writing from a male endeavour to any writer's regardless of gender.

Mary Seacole, the Creole doctress, moved Black, Caribbean, female autobiography into the travelogue genre, which is not a narrative typically associated with this group. In fact, Seacole's autobiography seems to be the only non-European, Caribbean female travelogue. Seacole's travelogue is also unique because in it she gives backchat by asserting her right to be recognised as a Crimean War heroine—a title that has historically been assigned to Seacole's nemesis, Florence Nightingale. While Nightingale accomplished much for the troops, Seacole's travelogue reveals a woman who is resourceful, effective, tenacious, and fearless. Her decision to travel to a war zone without housing or financial support is indicative of a strong personality, but her appearance on the battlefield, pulling the wounded to safety, is heroic in a way that women are rarely credited with being. Yet, amid the battles and sickness, she is also feminine; Seacole's concern with her wardrobe reaffirms her femininity. While Seacole knew that Nightingale was undermining her at every turn, she still did everything that she set out to do in the Crimea, but it is her refusal to be silenced—to tell her story—that is impressive.

In Joyce Gladwell's autobiography, her focus on her spiritual journey and her admission of battling depression are exceptional because, typically, these topics are not raised by Black female authors. Mental health researcher Dawn Edge believes that Black Caribbean women are more likely to rely on coping mechanisms to deal with depression because of the stigma attached to mental illness (43). However, Gladwell's open discussion of depression lifts the stigma attached to this illness. When she explains her experiences matter-of-factly rather than with hesitation or shame, Gladwell is giving backchat because she is not trying to hide the reality of depression from her audience. Edge's research exposes the shame attached to Black Caribbean women admitting that they are hurting, and, therefore, human; Gladwell's narrative places emphasis on the human element of suffering from depression, suggesting that this can affect

anyone and that there is no need to conceal depression. While Gladwell does rely on spirituality to recover, she is also honest about the multiple times that faith and prayer did not lift her bouts of depression, making her recovery more time-consuming and, by extension, more realistic.

Overall, the Caribbean female narratives discussed in this dissertation are portions of a very small collection of autobiographical writing from regional women writers. To date, there are few Caribbean female autobiographies, which raises the question: ‘Why?’. The lack of information of non-European women’s lives in the region is frustrating as it points to an incomplete regional history. This absence suggests that silencing is not theoretical but factual; non-White Caribbean women are being excluded from the region’s historical narrative, posing an interesting series of questions for historians who would like a more complete version of the region’s past. These narratives are also helpful in constructing a clear depiction of Black Caribbean women’s lives from slavery to independence, placing emphasis on the overwhelming odds these women overcame and on their achievements.

The Caribbean female migrant novel opens a different discussion on the depictions of women’s lives than autobiography because this medium allows authors the freedom to openly confide when, perhaps, in the autobiography genre they might hesitate. This is particularly relevant for Jean Rhys, whose novel *Voyage in the Dark* broaches topics that may not have been acceptable in that era. Writing a novel allowed Rhys to give backchat—to rail against a Caribbean social structure that prepared White Creole women to do nothing, placing them in the precarious position of choosing between dignity and survival. Rhys’ autobiography *Smile Please* was left incomplete, Rhys having passed away before finishing the text, but there is some doubt that she would have revealed any more had she completed it. The original notebooks for the novel contained information about Rhys’ life as a mistress; it is unlikely that she would have felt

as comfortable recounting the same narrative in an autobiography. Yet, in *Voyage* Rhys is honest and bold, giving the intimate and often unpleasant details of a Caribbean female immigrant's life in the years before WWI.

Beryl Gilroy's migrant novel *In Praise of Love and Children* is not of the artistic calibre as Rhys' work, largely because Gilroy was an untrained writer who was not allowed to join the 'boys club' at the publishing companies or the BBC's *Caribbean Voices*. However, an examination of *In Praise* reveals it is an authentic story clearly depicting some of the issues immigrant parents and children faced once they became entangled in Britain's social services systems. *In Praise* is a multi-focal migrant novel, taking the audience back and forth between the Caribbean and England and the past and present. In the story, Gilroy, through Melda, expresses considerable frustration with the 'way things are' and struggles to bring the 'way things should be' to fruition. Gilroy gives backchat throughout the novel, challenging a public education and foster-care system that are not serving the most vulnerable members of the population—British or Caribbean. This brutal honesty as well as the discussion of a 'spinster' school teacher turned foster mother, while providing an excellent example of giving backchat, are also the reasons why this novel remained unpublished for four decades but also reasons why this novel deserves more recognition.

Andrea Levy's novels of identity, *Never Far from Nowhere*, *Every Light in the House Burnin'*, and *Fruit of the Lemon* addresses second-generation Britons—children of immigrants born in the UK. This group does not receive as much attention as their immigrant parents because the assumption is that if they are born in Britain, they are British and should not face the same hardships that their immigrant parents did. However, Levy's novels of identity reveal a more complex situation for this group. They feel British, which they view as their birth right, but

they also feel some detachment from this idea of being British; occasionally, their detachment stems from their parents' foreign origins but sometimes this results from alienation in social settings, such as school, among friends, or in their living environment. Yet, throughout the novels, Levy both expresses this detachment and gives backchat against it, reaffirming the second generation's right to consider themselves Britons because Britain is their home. In her novels of identity, Levy also seems to want the second generation to better connect to their parent's Caribbean roots to find a balance between their British birth rights and the Caribbean origins. While it would be easy for Levy to avoid the topic of Caribbean descent, she pushes the topic in each novel of identity, albeit to different degrees, challenging second-generation protagonists to find a balance between British birth and Caribbean origins. Levy seems to suggest that there must be a way to reconcile both elements of second-generation identity without sacrificing either.

The Caribbean female immigrant novel discussed in this dissertation offer glimpses into women's experiences at different times in England's immigration history; however, so much information seems to be missing—particularly from the *Windrush* period. While Gilroy's *In Praise* fills in the gaps about female *Windrush* immigrants, hers remains the only *Windrush* novel centring on a woman's life. This novel gives only one point of view, omitting married women, single women dating, and a myriad of other women's experiences that could better construct what life was like for immigrant women of this period. Like Gilroy, Rhys' *Voyage* creates another issue; as the only one of its kind, it constructs a historical image but one that is very narrow. Levy's novels of identity also fail to give a well-rounded image of second-generation life in England after the Conservative push to halt immigration. Horace Ové's film *Pressure* (1975) addresses second-generation adolescents struggling to survive, looking for jobs,

joining Black liberation organisations, or surviving encounters with the police, yet these topics never come up for Levy's protagonists. These issues are all race-based, and, while Levy's protagonists are of Afro-Caribbean descent, they seem to fare better in England than Ové's protagonist Tony, raising the question of why Levy chose not to address these topics with similar intensity. Despite their shortcomings, the Caribbean immigrant novel poses many challenges, giving backchat to societies that exclude or marginalise female immigrants or the children of immigrants even after years of contact and attachment. These novels challenge audiences to examine the plight of the female immigrant and to question why this group can sometimes remain marginalised.

Caribbean migrant poetry introduces pieces that utilise Caribbean Creole languages, are heavily influenced by Caribbean music, and promote Caribbean identity. Una Marson's "Quashie Comes to London" demonstrates a shift in her consciousness from British writer in the Caribbean to Caribbean writer in England. The use of Jamaican Creole in this poem suggests that Marson was moving away from imitating British poetry to crafting a poetry style that was distinctly Jamaican. In the poem, Marson creates a character who is completely Jamaican and who, at the end of the piece, states that England is not where he wants to be. Typically, Caribbean migrant writing includes characters who are obsessed with migrating to the UK; Quashie is no different at the beginning and throughout the poem. However, in the last line of the poem, Quashie's statement that he 'sick fe see white face' is Marson giving backchat (Marson line 168). In that line, Marson, through Quashie, is stating that migration may be an adventure of exploring one's new surroundings and having new experiences, but it can also cause isolation—particularly to those migrants who become racial minorities in the host country. Quashie's reference to "white face" expresses his frustration with perhaps being the solitary Black in social

settings, which must be overwhelming. Yet, as Elizabeth Thomas-Hope's research found, the immigrant experience is typically recounted positively, ignoring the hardships encountered along the way. Therefore, it is only natural that Quashie would wait until the end of his letter to express this hidden annoyance and to tell his friends "it not gwine be anoder yer/Before you see me face" (Marson lines 1165-166).

Jean Binta Breeze and Eintou Pearl Springer bring the influence of reggae and calypso, respectively, to Caribbean migrant poetry. Like Marson, they utilise Caribbean Creole languages, but their poetry reflects the region's storytelling culture as they are performance-based pieces. The narrator of Breeze's "The Arrival of Brighteye" is Brighteye, a child navigating the new, foreign environment that she has been forced into with a child's innocence but also awareness. Brighteye can figure out that immigration has made her mother a stranger and that they may not know each other at first sight. This issue is made painfully evident when Brighteye mistakes an older White woman for her mother on the docks. Also, it does not escape Brighteye's notice that in the six years that her mother was gone, she married and had two other children with her husband; all while Brighteye was in Jamaica with Granny waiting for her mother to send for her. These events in Brighteye's life are mentioned because they are Breeze giving backchat. Breeze is concerned with the children who were left behind when their parents immigrated to Britain during the *Windrush* period. The stories of these children, who like Brighteye are probably grandparents now, seem to have been forgotten or avoided. These former child immigrants seem to suddenly appear in Britain but with little explanation about how or why. Breeze's reference to serial migration in "The Arrival" challenges this process because it takes a toll on the children who are left behind. Parent-child separation was one issue, but the physical displacement from familiar people and surroundings was painful for child immigrants as well. By the end of the

poem, Breeze audience is likely questioning whether serial migration was beneficial to the children initially left behind and later forced into migrating.

Springer's "London Blues" is concerned with Afro-Caribbean immigrant women in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The poem's narrator does not describe any of the elements of migration previously discussed but is instead trying to form a connection with a Caribbean man she sees on a London street. This woman is an archetypal 'strong woman' who sacrifices for her causes and her man, but, because Afro-Caribbean men are preoccupied with erasing "a feeling/of black inferiority," she is ignored (Springer lines 34-45). The avoidance by a man who should at least acknowledge her leads to her question: "I doh look like woman/ah doh feel/like woman" (Springer lines 19-21). Throughout "London Blues," Springer gives backchat to this open rejection of a woman who has given so much to men like the one she encounters on the street. The poem is not a testament to anger but an expression of frustration with a situation that cannot be overcome. This woman, who wonders if she has "razor blade/.../between these legs," seems to want an explanation rather than an apology (Springer lines 24 and 26).

This dissertation discusses Caribbean migrant poetry that reflects the musical and writing cultures of their countries of origin. These poems are examples of the evolution of Anglophone Caribbean writing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which has developed from simply imitating English poetry to the creation of styles that are distinct to the region. Caribbean migrant poetry discusses the immigrant experience while giving backchat throughout. Marson reverses the migrant narrative from an adventure to a story of isolation and of being overwhelmed by that isolation. Breeze asks her audience to examine the plight of the child immigrant to determine why their stories have been avoided. Springer discusses relationships in a diaspora, wondering what happened to loyalty and love. These poems are straightforward, addressing topics that are perhaps not at the

forefront of migration studies but are, nonetheless, relevant to migration history and using this medium to voice their concern creatively.

While giving backchat is viewed through a negative, gendered lens, it exceeds the definition of disrespectful speech, which American backtalk exemplifies. Giving backchat may be gendered speech, but it has moved beyond the bounds of its negative connotation in Caribbean societies mirroring, in some ways, hooks' "right speech of womanhood" (6). The texts examined throughout demonstrate that giving backchat offers girls and young women a voice in societies, families, and cultures that can forcibly seek to silence anyone who deviates from the norm. Women use giving backchat to interrogate, to challenge, and to advocate in situations in which they would typically be forced into silence. Giving backchat works both with and against Audre Lorde's claim that the master's tools will never dismantle his house. To write back to the British literary canon, as in the texts discussed, is to interrogate the ethos of that structure; to demand the inclusion of the Other's voice; and to consistently advocate for the restructure of the canon. The texts examined throughout demonstrate that Empire, which has had an overall deleterious impact on its colonies, failed to subordinate Caribbean art, including literature. Anglophone regional literature flourished with its own characteristics that, in some ways, are indebted to the influences of the British canon but also to orature from Africa, India, and indigenous groups as all are recognised—particularly in the texts of Caribbean female writers. These women, the culture bearers, brought regional literature to the seat of the Empire, demanding to be acknowledged as both part of and unique from British literature. Caribbean female writers have made considerable contributions to regional literature, and, in their texts they continue to give backchat—to interrogate, to challenge, and to advocate.

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